Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

DAVID LAMBERTSON

Interviewed by: David Reuther

Initial interview date: August 31, 2004

Q: Good morning. I'm David Reuther with the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training with another interview in our oral history series. Today, the 31st of August, 2004, we're with David Lambertson, a career Foreign Service Officer who capped his service as Ambassador to Thailand. We're also enjoying a beautiful morning in Winchester, Kansas. Good morning David.

LAMBERTSON: Good morning, David.

Q: It's a pleasure to be here with you. Let's start off with your personal adventure as a career Foreign Service Officer. I can tell that you've had a number of very interesting assignments at interesting periods in this country's history. Before we get into that let me ask about your background. You're from Kansas here?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, I am. I grew up about 60 miles from where we're sitting right now, near the town of Fairview. My dad was a farmer. I grew up on a farm and as you can see I've sort of reverted to form.

Q: Well, it's certainly beautiful. How much acreage do you have?

LAMBERTSON: We have 80 acres here.

Q: But you didn't stay in Kansas. Now, growing up on a farm in Kansas, how did you find or get a sense of the outside world out there?

LAMBERTSON: How did I find the Foreign Service? My family was interested in the world around them. My parents were avid newspaper readers and led me to become one, too. I always started with the sports pagstill do as a matter of facbut I read about world events. The Korean War, the French War in Indochinthose were big stories at the time I began to be aware of the world. My grandfather on my Dad's side, William P. Lambertson, was a Congressman for many years, although he was defeated before I became interested in that kind of thing. He had also been Speaker of the State Legislature, and an unsuccessful candidate for governor a couple of times. My grandfather on my Mother's side, Willis Shattuck, was a Democratic state legislator and judge for much of his life. So politics was part of the conversation, especially when those two grandfathers were together at our breakfast table, as happened sometimes. An aunt and uncle (an army officer), and cousins lived in Korea prior to the Korean War, and in Germany, and I was always intrigued with their lives. In my teens, I began to pay attention to the career of Bernard Rogers, a Fairview boy who had been Captain of Cadets at West Point-appointed there by my grandfather-and a Rhodes Scholar, and who was to become the NATO Commander. I suppose I secretly wanted to emulate him. I was very pleased that General Rogers and his wife were able to attend my swearing in as ambassador, by the way.

I had a normal small town, rural upbringing. I worked every summer for Dad on the farthe year-round for that matter. I went to the Baptist Church. I played football in the fall, basketball in the winter, and participated in track and field in the spring, for a high school with an enrollment of about 65. I had two brothers and a sister, and we had wonderful parents. I was not sophisticated about anything, but I was certainly not unaware of the world and its possibilities. My mother tells me I was always interested in going to faraway places.

Q: Well, your first adventure of going to a far away place was when you left for university.

LAMBERTSON: Right. I graduated from the University of Redlands in California. I had a checkered college career by the way. We don't need to go into it in detail, but I had a scholarship from the American Baptist Convention, the Northern Baptists, given to young men who it was thought might have the potential to be preachers. It was a reasonably good scholarship for those days and I used it at the University of Redlands, which was affiliated with the American Baptist Convention. That's how I got out to California.

Q: That's my point, Redlands is out in California, a little bit further than the Oregon Trail which passes us by here very closely. How did you pick Redlands? Was that on a scholarship?

LAMBERTSON: Redlands was a place where that scholarship was applicable and it was in California, which intrigued me for a combination of probably not very logical reasons; so that's where I ended up.

Q: So you arrived at Redlands in 1958?

LAMBERTSON: I arrived there only in 1960. I had done a couple of other things. I bounced around a bit during those years, but I nevertheless graduated from college four years after I graduated from high school and joined the Foreign Service six months after that. So I didn't waste a lot of time, but I didn't have a very straight path.

Q: What was your major at Redlands?

LAMBERTSON: Political science.

Q: You were telling me last night that you went from Redlands to my alma mater, Occidental College.

LAMBERTSON: That's right. Occidental had a brand new world affairs program, a masters degree program in world affairs and they were offering scholarships. I got one and spent one semester at Occidental, the fall semester of 1962. Then I joined the Foreign Service in February of '63.

Q: So, we were at Occidental at the same time?

LAMBERTSON: That's right.

Q: Did you pass the Foreign Service exam while at Oxy or while at Redlands?

LAMBERTSON: While at Redlands in the fall of 1961. I saw an advertisement for the exam on the political science department bulletin board. I had never considered the Foreign Service and was not at all familiar really with what it was, but I signed up for the exam which was given, I think, early in December in the main post office in Los Angeles.

Q: Can you describe that exam at that time? It's changed over the years.

LAMBERTSON: I don't remember much about the details. It was an all day affair. It seemed to me that it was fairly comprehensive. I later took the graduate record exam, I believe it's called, and to me they seemed somewhat similar. The GRE was easier I thought. It was a hot day in downtown L.A. in early December. The room was not air-conditioned. They had all the windows open. A big bunch of people were taking it.

Q: Sounds like the Chinese examination system.

LAMBERTSON: I remember we had three people from Redlands who took the exam and two of us passed. The other was Les Janka who did not join the Foreign Service. He decided to go in a different direction, but he also ended up in Washington. He was a deputy White House spokesman in the first Bush administration as I recall. He may have also had a Pentagon job in that administration. He was a very political guy and I think made his way up the ladder in the Republican Party. He's probably in New York City right now (for the Convention).

Q: Now, at that time after the written exam, I believe it was followed by an oral exam.

LAMBERTSON: The oral exam was in the spring. It was also some place in Los Angeles, I can't recall where. There were three elderly white men sitting across the table from me and I thought it was pretty easy. I particularly remember that one of them was interested in sports. He wanted to make sure that I was a well-rounded person I guess. Sports were and still are a favorite subject of mine, so we had an easy conversation about various sports figures. I recall also being asked some details about my home state of Kansas, including how large it was in area. I happened to know that, as everybody should know about their own state. So I suppose I got pretty high marks for being a real American. In any event, I thought the oral exam went smoothly and to me it seemed rather easy.

Q: Did all three of those people participate sort of serially. In my circumstance, one interviewer didn't participate until the very end, which of course created a different emotional environment.

LAMBERTSON: I don't recall anything like that. I just remember all of them sitting across the table.

Q: At that time you went, were you, were there a bunch of people in the waiting room and you all were called in serially?

LAMBERTSON: That's the way I remember it. I don't know if we were given a particular hour to show up. I presume we were, but we waited outside.

Q: So, you passed the oral?

LAMBERTSON: In the spring of 1962.

Q: The spring of '62, now when did you actually come onboard because they have the security clearance process.

LAMBERTSON: February of '63 after I had done my semester at Occidental.

Q: So, you were actually fairly committed, even though you were just responding to a poster on the board.

LAMBERTSON: I was excited about the possibility of living and working overseas and I had nothing else in mind to do with my life. I certainly didn't want to go to graduate school, that's what I was doing, but I regarded that strictly as a sort of filler. I wanted to get a job and start making the big bucks.

Q: Then you went into government. This was the start of the Kennedy administration so you had the whole Peace Corps, activist atmosphere; there was a renewed environment of interest in the outside world if you will.

LAMBERTSON: I think that's right. It was a good time to be a young person starting out in government. There was a certain spirit of adventure that maybe isn't always there.

Q: So, when you finished up one semester to Oxy, you then went back to Washington to take the A-100 course?

LAMBERTSON: That's right, February 1963.

Q: Was that on your nickel, or did they pay for it?

LAMBERTSON: I think maybe they paid for it. I drove my '56 Ford back there, but I think I may have gotten mileage and that sort of thing.

Q: You'd never been to the East Coast?

LAMBERTSON: Actually I had been to Washington, D.C. I visited there in the summer of '61, but I didn't have much experience there.

Q: How did you find accommodations, how did you get settled?

LAMBERTSON: I first stayed with an aunt who lives therthe one who had lived in Korea. Shortly after I got started I found an apartment off Columbia Road in a neighborhood that was either coming up or going down. I think at that time it might have been going down.

Q: You start Foreign Service basic training, the A-100 course. This should be an interesting collection of people in February of '63. Who else was in your A-100 course that you recall?

LAMBERTSON: I don't remember a lot of them personally and our careers diverged greatly. Rich Brown is the one I remember best and we ended up being housemates for a year. Rich died of a heart attack just a few months ago. His career was primarily in Latin America, although we did go to Vietnam at the same time. Rich was from Oklahoma and New Mexico and had gotten a degree at GW (George Washington University).

Mel Levitsky was from Sioux City, Iowa and I think graduated from the University of Iowa and was interested in the Soviet Union. He later was ambassador to Bulgaria as well as Brazil. I'd have to look at the list. The only one I really kept up with was Rich Brown.

Q: You know even the people you've mentionehere makes a point that is often overlooked certainly by the public which operates on the stereotype that the Foreign Service is the place of employment for the sons and daughters of the rich East Coast elite who go to Ivy League colleges. You don't exactly qualify, neither do your friends.

LAMBERTSON: That's right and nor probably did most of my A-100 classmates. We had a few people who fit into that mold, but I would say the majority of us were ordinary folks like myself, although the middle of the country might have been a little under-represented.

Q: Like yourself, were most of them coming right from academics or did they have other experience?.

LAMBERTSON: We had a number of people who had a little bit of experience doing something elsthe military, teaching or getting a Ph.D., or practicing law. We had several lawyers in our group. I was one of the youngest in the class. I think there was one younger, Tom Wajda, who was 21 to my 22. The average age must have been in the high twenties, so many of them had been doing something between college and entry into the Foreign Service.

Q: That's interesting because I would have, I came in almost six or seven years later, the group was younger and half of them were actually just arriving from their Peace Corps tours.

LAMBERTSON: We were too early to have gotten any Peace Corps veterans because they would have still been in their first tour in February of 1963. So, we were kind of pre-Peace Corps.

Q: How did the training at the A-100 strike you at that time?

LAMBERTSON: It struck me as quite interesting and struck a lot of my colleagues, I think, as boring and not very good. I think just about everybody in the group was in most ways more sophisticated than I about stuff like that. I thought A-100 was kind of fun and for the most part interesting.

Q: Anything that particularly stands out that seemed like a real introduction to diplomacy or international affairs or was it all how to do your name cards.

LAMBERTSON: No, as I recall we had some good, substantive lectures. One that I remember was from somebody on the language side of FSI touting the importance of learning to speak the language. An example they had was...you probably saw it too...it was a CBS television film of an interview in Vietnam. You saw it?

Q: Yes.

LAMBERTSON: The American interviewer asks the Vietnamese peasant through an interpreter, what do you think of the communists and the interpreter turns to the peasant and says, count to ten and shake your fist. Mot, hai, ba... Then the interpreter turns to the interviewer and says the farmer hates the communists.

Q: It's striking in its simplicity...the importance of language that unless you look your interlocutor in the eye and listen to what he says, you're not getting the feedback, the data stream, that you really need.

LAMBERTSON: I think that's very true. There have been times in my career when I have missed something because I wasn't good enough in the language or able to speak the language at all. It's a tremendous handicap.

Q: Let's see, well at the time you were in the A-100 was that the time of the Cuban missile crisis or was that earlier?

LAMBERTSON: The Cuban missile crisis was when I was at Occidental actually.

Q: That's right. As A-100 winds down, there's the assignment process. They have their list and you have your wishes. How did that unfold?

LAMBERTSON: I believe I indicated on some sort of form my areas of preference. I'm quite sure I put Southeast Asia at the top and Latin America probably was number two. I think Latin America was number two because it was very much in the news still in the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis and I think because in the Kennedy administration there was a lot of emphasis on Latin America in general. It had raised itself in my consciousness, so I put down Latin America. I don't know what my third choice might have been, Europe maybe. In any event, when the assignments were announced I was told I would be joining an information retrieval project in the Administration Bureau of the State Department, just a terrible thing.

Q: Now, you earlier said you put Southeast Asia on your list. Were you responding to a personal interest in Southeast Asia or the daily news as the Kennedy administration dealt with Laos?

LAMBERTSON: I am sure the media focus on Southeast Asia attracted my attention, but my interest went back before that. Southeast Asia had always been an interesting place to me. I remember the battle of Dien Bien Phu and the end of the French experience in Vietnam. It was a very dramatic thing, something that made headlines in the United States in 1954, when I was in the eighth grade. I think ever since then I considered Vietnam in particular as an interesting and kind of mysterious and romantic place.

Q: At the time that you were at Occidental, Ed Mill taught IR classes, right?

LAMBERTSON: Edward Mill, descendant of John Stuart Mill.

Q: What was his background? I've forgotten. As a Foreign Service Officer wasn't he a Europeanist?

LAMBERTSON: No, he had some Southeast Asia experience. He had been a consul in Surabaya at some point and I don't know quite what his status was, whether it was Agency-connected or something else. He was not an FSO, but he had been consul in Surabaya and he had also been in the Philippines, where he did some outstanding work in training the nascent Philippine diplomatic corps. So, he had a lot of interest in Southeast Asia and knew a lot of people there. That was his regional passion. In fact, he was a winner of the Magsaysay Award for his work in the Philippines. We became rather close. He visited Saigon while I was there, at least once.

Q: Excellent. Well, this pilot information retrieval project sounds really exciting. You checked Southeast Asia and Latin American and your reward was...?

LAMBERTSON: My reward was being assigned to a windowless office on the fifth floor of the main State Department building along with about a half a dozen other junior Foreign Service Officers including Rich Brown from my A-100 class and a number of other victims from earlier classes. The reason junior officers were found there, I believe, was that the project had a very limited budget. It was being run by, and was the brainchild of a retired Navy captain who believed in information retrieval possibilities. But because he had no money to hire anyone he had to find free labor. So he went to the Junior Officer Division, which was looking for places to shunt people and at least a half a dozen of us ended up there. It was an outrageous thing for the JO Division to have done.

Q: What information were they retrieving?

LAMBERTSON: We would read CIA reports about Cuba that were generated during and just after the Cuban missile crisis, all ex-post facto stuff, rarely anything of continuing relevance as I recall. We would read those reports and then extract the key information and record it on some kind of a form that could later be transferred to some sort of machine readable card. It was just terrible.

Q: Now stored somewhere in some government warehouse.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, our work is still stored I imagine. We really, as a group, were very depressed with it all. Our productivity was extremely low. Our morale was very low, cynicism very high and I think if it had gone on much longer a few of us might have resigned and tried something else with our lives. But fortunately in the spring of '64 the project was ended. I guess what little money there was ran out, so we were freed at last.

I might add that somewhere during that period, possibly when the info retrieval project ended, or maybe at the tail end of the A-100 class, I spent a month or so as an intern in the office of one of the Kansas senators, Frank Carlson. I enjoyed being on the Hill. I remember sitting in the House gallery while Sam Rayburn presided. And I recall attending a hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, held in its small committee room in the Capital building. The committee members sat at a large oval table, and chairs around the perimeter of the room were available to anyone who wanted to watch. William Fulbright was presiding. The first witness was Bill Bundy, and he was followed by Dean Rusk. The subject was the situation in Southeast Asia. It was very intimate. Nobody passed through a metal detector, or past any kind of guard that I remember. Times were different.

Q: You were telling me that that was the period when you heard about the Kennedy assassination?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, when I was doing "information retrieval", on what had been a typical morning. We were sitting around drinking coffee - extracting very little information - and the wife of Pat Flood who was one of our colleagues called him and told him that Kennedy had been assassinated. So, we either got a radio or went someplace where there was one, or a television.

Q: It must have had a strong emotional impact on the group.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, it certainly did, as it did on everyone.

Q: You were saying to improve your mind during that time you were taking some early morning French at FSI (Foreign Service Institute)?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, I did take early morning French, out of a desire to at least feel that I was doing something positive with my life rather than simply whiling it away in that windowless room. Then when the project collapsed I got into a full time French course for a certain number of weeks, I can't remember how many, and ended up with a pretty good French score.

Q: That opportunity appeared because they didn't have anything to do with you basically?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, as I recall when the project ended there was nothing particular on tap, and we all sort of went out there and scanned the horizon and tried to figure out what might come next, and the next thing that appeared for me was a new Vietnam program. AID was hiring young officers to be provincial representatives in South Vietnam. That seemed right down my alley and so I volunteered for it.

Q: That was a secondment to AID?

LAMBERTSON: It was a secondment to AID. By that time the person in the Junior Officer Division running that program was Allan Wendt. Allan later joined us in Saigon and was the lucky guy who was in the embassy the night of the Tet offensive.

Q: Explain how they described this job to you.

LAMBERTSON: We would be working in provincial capitals in South Vietnam administering aid programs - assistance to farmers, development of co-ops, some public works projectand we would have a fair amount of authority in our particular provinces, working directly with the province chiefs and with the senior U.S. military advisor if there was one. It seemed to be a job that would offer a good deal of responsibility and certain opportunities for adventure. It sounded very good to me.

Q: When did you arrive in Saigon?

LAMBERTSON: Well, I was diverted from that program during the course of language training. After about one month of Vietnamese language training, which started in August of 1964, I was doing quite well in Vietnamese. We were in a six month course, newly designed specifically for this program. There were two other people in a ten month program who were going into the political section of the embassy. Dick Teare was one of them and Dick Burnham was the other. Dick Burnham was not having a great time in Vietnamese and I don't think he was particularly interested in it. So, Dick Burnham and I were switched, and to this day I don't know exactly how that was done. I don't know if the language people initiated it and it was then administratively affected somehow, but it was done without much reference to any grand personnel plan certainly. It just happened. I was consulted and decided to go with the flow. I was switched into the longer-term program with Dick Teare, and I stayed at FSI for ten months instead of leaving after six months.

Q: So you got into the Vietnamese language program as seconded to AID and then you got switched to regular Foreign Service embassy assignment.

LAMBERTSON: And Dick Burnham went into the AID program. Dick was an outstanding officer, but left the Foreign Service after maybe ten years or so and had a very good career with the World Bank.

Q: Now, you were telling me earlier that that group that was to be seconded to AID included Frank Wisner.

LAMBERTSON: Frank Wisner, Desaix Anderson, Steve Ledogar, Rich Brown, Clay Nettles. I don't know if you've ever run across Clay Nettles, he's a wonderful fellow. Paul London who was a very good officer; he left the Service early and made an interesting career on the Hill and other places. I've got that whole list downstairs along with a picture of the group as it appeared in the State Department newsletter. Would you like to have it? We were the first group of draftees for Vietnam and we were about half FSO and half AID direct-hires. The direct-hires included older guys who came from the LAPD and places like that and were in the Public Safety division of AID, as well as younger guys right off the street. We didn't know it, but we were the first cadre in what later became CORDS.

Q: I think that would be very interesting and we can add things like that to this record, but you're not going into CORDS, you're going into the embassy after more Vietnamese language. So, when did you actually arrive in Saigon?

LAMBERTSON: I arrived in Saigon in July of 1965.

Q: In the political section. How was the political section organized at that time?

LAMBERTSON: I think it was organized as any political section was, with the unusual exception of the so-called provincial reporting unit. The embassy had its traditional economic section, political section, consular section, AID and a huge CIA station, and then was of course operating side by side with and always in danger of being overwhelmed by MACV, the military headquarters. The provincial reporting unit was generally about a half dozen junior Foreign Service Officers who were assigned to the provinces, but traveled to those areas from Saigon. My territory in the beginning was the lower part of the Mekong Delta. We would stay on the road two, three or four days, come back, write a report about what we had seen and do the same thing the next week.

Q: You would touch bases with both Vietnamese officials and Americans that were out in these provinces. So, you'd speak to the governor and the district chief?

LAMBERTSON: Yes. I'd always see the governor, the members of the provincial council - provincial councils were more honorary than substantive, but they were reflective of what politics there were in the provinces. Prominent people. People who had something to say about the situation in Chuong Thien or Bac Lieu. Then always I would be in contact with the AID provincial representative, often one of my former colleagues from FSI, and with the U.S. military people who were there.

Q: Now describe the area that you were originally assigned to, what provinces or districts were those?

LAMBERTSON: It was the lower, the southern part of Four Corps. Vietnam was militarily divided into four corps areas. I Corps being in the North, II Corps being the Central Highlands and central coast, III Corps the area right around Saigon extending over to the Cambodian border, and IV Corps being the Mekong Delta. IV Corps was in turn divided into what I believe was the ninth infantry's area of responsibility and the 21st infantry's. These were Vietnamese military unit designationno U.S. troop units were in the Delta at that time. The lower part of the Mekong Delta was about as far off the map as you could get, the kind of place that the brand new guy in the provincial reporting unit would be assigned to. It included the southern tip of the Camau peninsula, mostly mangrove swamps and heavily infested with Viet Cong-Bac Lieu, Ba Xuyen, Chuong Thien right in the middle, Kien Giang on the Gulf of Siam side and An Giang, which was the stronghold of the Hoa Haa fundamentalist Buddhist religious sect and a fairly safe place because it was an unusually cohesive population. Can Tho was the biggest city in "my" region.

Q: You would meet with the Hoa Hao leaders?

LAMBERTSON: Yes. In the manner of traditional Foreign Service work, in all of these places I tried to get to know people who knew something or were in some way influential.The Hoa Hao were quite effective in knitting the community together and keeping out alien influences such as the Viet Cong.

Q: Would you describe your duties primarily as observing and reporting on what was going on and what resources were there?

LAMBERTSON: That's precisely what it was. It was nothing more. It was a very good job in terms of the opportunity it provided to travel rather widely in a particular area of Vietnam and be able to compare the way things were done in one province with the way they were done in another. It gave you therefore a slightly broader perspective than my AID colleagues would have had. But it wasn't as meaty as being a provincial representative in other ways. I wasn't handing out money. I wasn't a decision maker in a particular province. I was simply a guy passing through and reporting back to Saigon.

Q: What was traveling like in those days?

LAMBERTSON: Well, it was by air almost exclusively.

Q: An Otter or something like that?

LAMBERTSON: Usually by Air America transport, and Air America flew twin engine Beechcraft, tail draggers, not the more modern turbo props or King Air type Beechcraft although a few of those were coming into the inventory by the time I left Saigon. That was probably the most common type of airplane that I flew in, but I also flew in the latest Pilatus Porters, a wonderful turbo prop, high-wing, single engine thing that could take off in about a hundred yards, literally. There were Dorniers, a funny French twin engine high-winged airplane, with the engines down on the wing struts. Yes, Otters as well. The Otters, however, were always U.S. army aircraft, but we used them. Then very often helicopters. Also C-46s and C-47s. Caribous, C-123s. I could go on

Q: Air was chosen over land?

LAMBERTSON: Air was chosen over land because land travel would have required a heavily armed military convoy to get from Saigon to virtually anywhere I was going. You could drive from Saigon to My Tho, where Frank Wisner worked. I think in good periods you could perhaps drive all the way to Vinh Long, one of "my" provinces which was the next one down, but you were risking things to try to go much beyond that. The roads very often were out. They had been sabotaged and/or fallen into total disrepair because of nonuse. So, to get to a provincial capital from Saigon, you almost always had to go by air. I went back to Vietnam as a tourist in 1995 and we drove all the way from Hue to Saigon and My Tho. It was quite wonderful because I saw country that I'd only seen from the air in the sixties, including much of that beautiful central coastline.

Q: The requirement to use air all the time must have underscored the idea that it wasn't secure and there were things that needed to be done.

LAMBERTSON: There was no doubt about that. I think the war in the Delta was always pretty low intensity. There were rarely major battles that resulted in huge numbers of casualties. There were often large sweeps by Vietnamese military units and later by the U.S. 25th infantry division, but they rarely resulted in major contacts with hundreds of people killed. Most of the war in the Delta, right up to the end of the Vietnam War, was ambushes and attacks on isolated outposts by roving bands of guerrillas or increasingly well armed units of one kind or another. It made the whole area insecure in the sense that it was certainly unsafe to be out on the road and a long way from home. As I say, within the various provinces there were safe areas. I think for example in Vinh Long province you could easily drive from Vinh Long to Sa Dec which was a major district capital 30 or 40 miles away. In An Giang province, the Hoa Hao area, there were broad areas in which you could travel safely. But in most of the Delta it was quite risky. You couldn't really safely plan a Sunday afternoon drive through the countryside.

Q: So, what then was the theme that you'd say would come out of your reporting for this period?

LAMBERTSON: I'd be interested and probably embarrassed to read some of my provincial reports from that first six or eight months on the job. I imagine I was far less critical than I should have been and far less discerning - probably just generally naive. But there was a lot of variation. I think probably after I'd been to An Giang or Kien Giang I would write a pretty doggone upbeat report about prospects for security and stability in that province and the way the war was going there. But after visiting Vi Thanh, the capital of Chuong Tien province, there was very little positive one could have possibly said, because Vi Thanh was an island in a sort of rice paddy sea of hostility as I remember it. You really couldn't go anywhere outside that little town unless you were armed and accompanied by lots of guys.

Q: So, you were in the provincial reporting unit of the political section. Who are some of the other PRU people?

LAMBERTSON: When I arrived there Bill Marsh was the head of the provincial reporting unit. Bill had been there at least a couple of years by then, a very good officer. He was a strong intellect. He wrote well, he spoke well. He had an ebullient, expansive personality. Still does. After a year or so, Dick Teare replaced Bill as head of the unit.

Q: Here we go. Vlad Lehovich?

LAMBERTSON: Vlad had arrived a year or two before me. I think he and Dick Holbrooke took language training together. I'm not sure if they had a full ten months of it, but they had some Vietnamese language training together and I think arrived in '62 or early '63. Steve Lyne, later an ambassador in Africa, was provincial reporter for the mountainous regions and our man among the Montagnards. He was not a Vietnamese language speaker, but he didn't really have to be for that particular portfolio because he was dealing with tribesmen who were a non-Vietnamese people.

David Engel was in the section when I arrived. David Engel was a wonderful Vietnamese speaker, the best I think the Foreign Service ever had. He was later Henry Kissinger's interpreter in private meetings with Le Duc Tho in Paris. He was assigned to the upper part of the Delta.

Later on we had two David Browns. David E. Brown and David G. Brown who shared an office in the new embassy when we moved therdesks back to back. Both of them were very good writers and very good reporters I thought.

Jim Bullington arrived in Vietnam when I did or shortly thereafter. I'm not sure what his language training route had been because he wasn't in my class and he was not in the AID class, but I think he'd had some training. He spent a little bit of time in Saigon and then was almost immediately assigned to Hue or Da Nang. He was in both Da Nang and Hue.

Tim Carney was a provincial reporter at one point. Spence Richardson arrived a year after me and we were housemates after Dick Teare left. Harry Dunlop replaced Dick as chief of the unit. By and large I thought it was a very good group of people, some talented FSOs who had good careers later on.

Q: Now in terms of covering and reporting on Vietnam, the PRU is in the embassy; are Da Nang and Hue going to have PRU reporting for their areas, because Saigon is not all of Vietnam?

LAMBERTSON: I Corps was basically not covered from Saigon. It was covered from Da Nang/Hue, and this varied. We had a consulate in Hue and we at one point moved it to Da Nang, but we had had a consulate in Hue for a good long time. John Helble was consul there years ago. As I recall, I Corps provincial reporting was done by the people in Hue and/or Da Nang. We didn't have anybody who was in Saigon and traveled regularly to I Corps.

Q: There was a PRU type of reporting going on for every district.

LAMBERTSON: For every province.

Q: For every province. Actually that's a pretty impressive list of officers. Now, you're saying Holbrooke was in the PRU unit?

LAMBERTSON: No, Holbrooke actually was an AID provincial representative, before the term was coined perhaps.

Q: So, he was in the field.

LAMBERTSON: Yes. He spent at least six months in, I believe, Ba Xuyen province. In fact the first time I met Dick was when we were going through language training in the fall of '64 and he came back as a grizzled veteran and spoke to our group about what it was really like. By the time I got to Saigon, Dick was in the embassy. He had somehow moved from being a provincial representative in a very obscure part of the Delta to being the ambassador's special assistant or staff aid, to Maxwell Taylor. I'm not sure what Dick was doing when I got there. He was between opportunities perhaps. Henry Cabot Lodge had just returned. Dick didn't stay too long after I got there, but he was, I think, attached to the political section. He had long since stopped being a provincial representative. He had spent time in the front office. He was on his way.

Q: The PRU central reporting unit was part of the political section, but there was a political section doing sort of standard political reporting?

LAMBERTSON: The political section, the internal unit, was run by John Burke when I arrived. Burke was replaced by Ted Heavner, a very good officer. And there was an external unit, which had Dick Smyser, at one point Roger Kirk, and working in it for a time was Frederick Flott.

Did you ever hear of Fred Flott? Frederick W. Flott, whose job was to keep in touch with officials of allied embassies - at that time we were desperately trying to increase the numbers of "flags" that were flying in South Vietnam. So we made major efforts internationally to get other governments to send troops, even if we paid the freight. Today we would call it a "coalition of the willing." Fred Flott spent a lot of time liaising with the embassies of troop-contributing countries, and so inevitably Frederick W. Flott was known as "Free World Freddy." That might have been Phil Habib's doing.

Q: You were saying Desaix Anderson was in that group that was seconded to AID. Was he out there at that time?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, they all arrived in the spring of 1965 and I didn't get out there until July of '65.

Q: They're provincial reporters?

LAMBERTSON: No, they're provincial representatives.

Q: Yes, they're out there and you're cycling through there if you will.

LAMBERTSON: Yes.

Q: Was Negroponte out there at that time?

LAMBERTSON: Yes. John had been a provincial reporter but had moved over to the internal unit of the political section and was working for John Burke, following Saigon domestic politics. Then I eventually moved in that direction myself and worked closely with John in the constitution building process that we attempted in South Vietnam.

Q: Was Hal Colbaugh around at this time?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, definitely. He came in probably six or eight months after I got there and he was assigned to I Corps. He was a great linguist. I believe he was based in Da Nang as a provincial reporting officer assigned to that office. I believe we still had the consulate in Hue. Da Nang was not a consulate, but it operated like one, to a greater extent than the other corps headquarters did. II Corps was headquartered in Nha Trang, III Corps was in Bien Hoa, and IV Corps was in Can Tho. But only Da Nang had an office that operated like a consulate.

Q: Standing back for a moment, Vietnam is becoming a major issue. Administratively State has an embassy, it has a consulate there and now they're adding these other reporting tools so it can report what's going on in Vietnam. So did State have a separate stream of information from MACV? I mean that's what the provincial reporters do. That's what the people who are now in place are doing. So, State has actually made a major commitment of manpower and resources to the whole Vietnam circumstances and you're listing names of people who have become quite noted years later from that experience who like yourself would become ambassadors and what not. It must have been a very...I don't want to say driving experience, but a very fulsome experience. It was an incredible introduction to the Foreign Service world.

LAMBERTSON: It was very intense. It was very absorbing. It was something you lived 24 hours. For a young guy it was exciting, extremely interesting. I felt like I was exactly where I wanted to be. Not everybody shared those feelings. A lot of people were sent there against their wishes, but for me it was something I really wanted to do. I've always felt that when something important is going on, it's better to be close to the action rather than to be out on the periphery. It's the same principle that would hold, for example, when there's a presidential visit coming to your country and you have a chance to work on the trip or to try to insulate yourself from it to the extent possible. The best thing to do is to plunge in and be part of it and be close to the action. In Saigon I felt very close to the action. I liked that. It was exciting.

Q: Was your entire tour spent in the provincial reporting unit or you were saying that you were moving onto other duties in time?

LAMBERTSON: My provincial reporting experience actually was in two parts. Most of it was in the Lower Mekong Delta, but I also did a few months as a provincial reporter in the central coastal provinces, replacing Vlad Lehovich who by then had finished at least three years. That was a good change of scene for me and it broadened my perspective a bit. A different kind of war in the central provinces, much more main force action - and more intense politics traditionally, because that had always been a more highly developed part of the country. Then in the...I would say...the spring of 1966, we - the United States government - came to the conclusion that something better had to be done in terms of developing a viable South Vietnamese government that might command the respect of its people.

There had been a series of coups and revolving-door military governments in Saigon ever since the November 1963 assassination of Diem. There were Nguyen Khanh, "Big" Minh, Nguyen Cao Ky and Nguyen Van Thieu, jousting with each other. It was a mess, and a situation that was causing a rapid diminution of confidence in the United States in addition to the effect that it was having within South Vietnam. There was no real effective government in Saigon; therefore, the war effort in the provinces was hampered and diluted and made ineffective. In the United States people were beginning to wonder what this was all about. So, in the spring of '66, we began a process of constitutional government building. It was, I'm sure, more our initiative than the initiative of the South Vietnamese, but we guided them through a process - electing a constituent assembly, i.e., a constitutional assembly, drafting a constitution and then on the basis of that constitution, electing a president - between 1966 and the end of 1967. When that happened I moved to the internal unit of the political section and this constitution building effort became my full-time job, mine and John Negroponte's.

Q: How does that express itself?

LAMBERTSON: Well, first, we were involved in organizing and developing the rules for the constituent assembly election as I remember. I don't recall exactly what entities we were working with or through. The ambassador and the big guns in the embassy worked with the South Vietnamese leadership establishing the ground rules and timing for the constituent assembly election. For me it meant a lot of traveling prior to the constituent assembly election to the provinces, including places I'd never been to before, to talk with local officials and encourage people to run for office, and to talk with American officials and explain to them what this was going to be all about and encourage them to watch the process closely and let us know what was happening. In that brief period I traveled to darn near every province in the country. I recall returning to the embassy at midnight from one such trip and writing up a long report on a yellow legal pad and taking it directly to the code room. There was a response to it the next day, commenting on some issues I had raised. I later learned it had been written personally by Dean Rusk. That seemed perfectly natural somehow. The election was held in, you probably know this from your chronology, the summer of '66 and a constituent assembly was convened in Saigon and began the process of drafting a constitution. Negroponte and I were basically the embassy's lobbyists. We spent all day in the old opera house advising these Vietnamese politicians on how to draft a really good constitution.

Q: Not exactly a reprise of what MacArthur did in Tokyo; there were other things quite distracting at the time going on.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, and MacArthur had full authority, we didn't, notwithstanding what some people thought. We learned our limitations as this process went forward. We did have some influence, undoubtedly, on the shape of the constitution. We had a guy attached at that time to the political section - Phil Habib was political counselor - a fellow by the name of Bert Flanz, who was an academic and whose specialty was constitutions. He had been sent out to Seoul in the early sixties when Phil was the political counselor there to help us help the Koreans write a constitution. In any event, he was there and we had lots of people with lots of fixed ideas about what ought to be in that constitution and what ought not be in it. One of the points that we worked hardest on was Article IV, which as written would have prohibited anyone who was ever a member of the Viet Cong from ever having any role in the political life of South Vietnam. We wanted to eliminate that or change it so that in the future in South Vietnam there could be some degree of political reconciliation in which former Viet Cong could be members of the national assembly or otherwise participate in politics. The constituent assembly members were very strongly set against that and it was not changed. I think the constituent assembly was a group of authentic representatives of their communities. Article IV was something that they felt strongly about and that probably a great many of their constituents also felt strongly about. A spirit of reconciliation was not abroad in the land. In any event we certainly lost on that provision, and on others.

Q: You were mentioning a moment ago that Phil Habib comes in as a political counselor. What's it like to work for Phil Habib?

LAMBERTSON: I always thought it was great working for Phil Habib. He arrived in the political section shortly after I did. When I got there the previous Counselor, Mel Manfull, was just leaving. I was kind of inhibited by Phil when I first saw him and I thought, man, he comes on awfully strong. You know, brusque, a lot of humor there, but you don't necessarily recognize it right at first. Very smart. He soon became very popular with everybody who worked for him. He was a much-loved guy. I felt that way about him in Saigon and I was lucky to work for him, there and in a couple of other places.

Q: So, that admiration was professional?

LAMBERTSON: Professional and personal. Personally he was always entertaining to be around. He had boundless energy. He and Barry Zorthian, the public affairs counselor, and John Negroponte, the most sophisticated junior officer I ever came across, and one other guy would have an all night poker game once a week. I don't know how they did it, but Phil was able to burn the candle at both ends in those days and he kept doing it until he had the first of his heart attacks. I was still in Saigon, and Phil was by then back in Washington when he came out to Saigon for a visit shortly after the Tet Offensive. Phil came out to assess the situation and to go back with his own views as to what we ought to be doing. More troops, fewer troops, etc. During his visit he had what I'll bet was a mild heart attack. He sort of collapsed at Arch Calhoun's house on a Sunday afternoon. He didn't have a full-scale heart attack as far as I know until he was ambassador to Seoul, but he was clearly on the way. Anyway, he was extremely energetic, very bright, a man with a complete common touch, no pretensions about him at all. You couldn't help but like him.

Q: His guidance on the reporting from the section, was he saying, go for it guys?

LAMBERTSON: Oh, yes, Phil would never have suggested that anybody shade the truth as they saw it for the sake of some sort of harmonious product. He wasn't like that. You always felt that you had his backing and that he intended for people to call the shots as they saw them.

Q: You were suggesting a little mentoring perhaps on his part, talk to the officers on a personal level, what are you going to do after this. By then he had seen quite a bit of the Foreign Service.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, I think he was good at giving career advice. I probably had better conversations with him later on in Paris and in Washington than I did in Saigon where he was busier and I was one of a great many chicks in his flock. I remember in Paris once talking with Phil about his work as a deputy assistant secretary just after he'd gotten back from being political counselor in Saigon, and in that capacity he was probably the Department's senior guy who did nothing but Vietnam. He had a lot of contact as a result with all the big players in the administration right up to and including Lyndon Johnson. He sort of marveled at the idea that he, Phil Habib, a kid from Brooklyn, was moving in those circles and he appreciated it. It was touching.

Q: You were talking about a visit that he made later, but you had recalled for me that when you were in this assignment as provincial reporter in the central provinces that you had a visit from Henry Kissinger.

LAMBERTSON: Kissinger back in the mid '60s was a consultant to the Johnson administration on Vietnam, a country about which he knew very little. But nevertheless, he had his views and he paid periodic visits in his consultancy capacity. Sam Huntington also came out once or twice, along with Allan Goodman who was a graduate student then and is now dean at Georgetown. In any event, one time when Kissinger came, Harry Dunlop and I accompanied him to Qui Nhon, capital of Binh Dinh province, where he was to get briefings on the pacification program and how things were going in the war in Binh Dinh province. We flew up in a twin engine Cessna. I think the army night have called it a U-21. Anyway it was a small aircraft, but adequate to the task. We got to Qui Nhon and went through briefings, carefully prepared briefings, by Vietnamese and U.S. army officers. Kissinger was bored by it all and I think got very little out of it, and his boredom was evident to everyone. As I recall it was a little bit embarrassing. When it came time to return to Saigon, we went out to the airport at Qui Nhon, which was U.S. army-controlled, run by a U.S. army colonel. Gale force winds had come up during the course of the day and the airport was closed. Sandbags were being placed on top of the wings of the airplanes lined up along the tarmac. Kissinger was dismayed because he had a dinner appointment that night with Henry Cabot Lodge; this was a big deal and he wanted to keep that appointment. Our pilot was a very senior colonel and held a rating of master pilot, which he contended allowed him to override the wishes of base commanders. So he and the base commander had a nasty argument after which we took off. There was a small mountain at the end of that runway and I remember when he pulled the nose up we seemed to almost bounce off the ground. It was one of the scariest flights I ever made, and I made a lot of questionable flights in small aircraft while I was in Vietnam. Kissinger was in a white knuckle condition the entire way back to Saigon as Harry and I were too, I imagine. But he got to his dinner appointment with Henry Cabot Lodge on time and so he was presumably happy at the end of the day. Kissinger, we knew, was a guy who didn't like flying much except in very large aircraft. Thus, he was really making a risky move by his lights to get in this little airplane under those conditions. That's how important that dinner with Henry Cabot Lodge was for him.

Q: He white knuckled it the whole way down.

LAMBERTSON: You bet.

Q: Vietnam is a major issue and is going to attract a lot of visitors. Were there any others that you recall? My notes say that McNamara came out in August of '65. There must have been others that you were involved with.

LAMBERTSON: When is your McNamara trip?

Q: It's August of '65.

LAMBERTSON: Actually I am thinking of Thanksgiving of '65. I was with Bill Marsh. We were having our Thanksgiving with the Special Forces "A" team on Phu Quoc Island and we got word while we were there that SECDEF was on his way and we were needed back in Saigon, so they sent an airplane for us. I don't remember the first McNamara visit and I don't remember a whole lot about the visit that we returned for in November of '65. We had a whole host of prominent congressional people coming through, including a Senate Foreign Relations Committee delegation led by Mike Mansfield. Mansfield was of course a strong skeptic of our Vietnam effort. I remember sitting in on a briefing for him in the political counselor's living room. Presidential hopefuls visited, and other prominent people. I met Richard Nixon in Phil Habib's upstairs lounghe was traveling under Pepsi Cola auspices. Ed Muskie visited around the time of the constituent assembly election I believe, and I accompanied him around town and interpreted for him. George Romney of Michigan, of course, famously visited Vietnam and my housemate Dick Teare was in charge of his visit and therefore presumably was at least partially responsible for "brainwashing" him. I had lunch one time at Ambassador Lodge's table on his patio, where he always had lunch in good weather, with Walter Mondale, who at that time was the up and coming young Attorney General of Minnesota.

There were other prominent people from other walks of life who would breeze through Saigon to see the place, to boost the morale of the troops in one way or another, or for other reasons of their own. Many of them would somehow end up being in our care for a few hours or a few days. I took Mary McCarthy around Saigon one time. Mary was acerbic and didn't seem real interested in what we were doing, but I tried to put Saigon's best face forward in our afternoon together. We visited several of the local sights including the opera house where the constituent assembly was in session and then we went across the street to the veranda of the Continental Hotel - a very pleasant spot - where we had coffee and I asked her what she thought of Saigon. She said, "It's a dreadful place."

Q: So, you stopped going into the tour business.

LAMBERTSON: Yes. It was as Baghdad would be today, where for one reason or another, politicians felt compelled to go, and when they went they required escorts, and very often that duty fell to the political section.

Q: Let's see, where are we? Why don't we take a break for a second? We were talking about the other experiences you were having out of the political section. You have a note here that in the spring of '66 you got involved in some interesting negotiations. You had spoken earlier about helping the constituent assembly do the constitution.

LAMBERTSON: Now, you're speaking of?

Q: This is a standoff in Hue?

LAMBERTSON: Oh, yes. Hue in the spring of '66 as I recall. This is before the constituent assembly process got started and it, in fact, was one of the events that gave a little bit of impetus to that process because it once again seemed to indicate that South Vietnam was coming apart at the seams. In the spring of '66, Nguyen Chanh Thi, who was the commander of I Corps as I remember it, was very much in opposition to the government in Saigon of Nguyen Cao Ky, a general in the air force. I don't remember what his exact grievances were, but he essentially was challenging the authority of Nguyen Cao Ky and in effect threatening to go his own way. His stance was completely unacceptable in Saigon, and it was troubling in the extreme to the United States as well, and we wanted to put an end to this incipient rebellion. We brokered a meeting between Nguyen Chanh Thi and Nguyen Cao Ky and the meeting was to take place at the villa on the beach in Da Nang of General Lou Walt, commander of the Third Marine Amphibious Force, the senior U.S. military officer in I Corps. Before the meeting took place we sent someone up to Da Nang to "wire" the room so that we would have our own independent record of what actually was said. The meeting took place on schedule and the tape was urgently flown back to Saigon. An interpreter/translator for another agency was going to attempt to transcribe the tape. Phil Habib instructed me to help him. So I and the other fellow went into a soundproof room somewhere in the bowels of that old embassy on Ham Nghi Street in Saigon and turned on the tape recorder. We could hear snatches of conversation, but primarily only the hum of a big floor fan as it rotated across the room. We couldn't get anything useful out of that tape. I think the floor fan was placed there because both Nguyen Chanh Thi and Nguyen Cao Ky suspected what we were trying to do and they didn't want us to hear what they were saying. I told Phil, "Sorry, there's nothing useful on this tape." You can probably imagine his reaction.

Q: High standards indeed. Actually you were noted or it was remarked by other people at the time that you were one of the best Vietnamese linguists in the mission at that time. In fact you tell another story here about translating between embassy and the South Vietnamese cabinet from time to time?

LAMBERTSON: That was not a translating or interpreting situation. That was a note-taking situation. The American Embassy country team, which naturally in Saigon had to be called something grander - it was the "mission council" met on a regular basis with the cabinet of South Vietnam, as if these were two co-equal bodies. In fact in many respects, we of course had the final say. In any event, there would be regular meetings between the prime minister and the ambassador and their respective staffs, i.e., the South Vietnamese cabinet and the American Embassy Mission Council. It would actually alternate between the presidential palace and the American Embassy. Even at the time it seemed to me that this was a demeaning practice to put the South Vietnamese through. They were after all, at least theoretically a sovereign government, and to have them troop over to the American Embassy for a meeting was really quite astounding when you think about it. I was the note taker for that meeting at least once, and had there been any need for translation it would have been French to English, not Vietnamese. All of the cabinet members spoke French fluently and fortunately almost all of them spoke English quite adequately. So, as I recall the meeting was almost entirely in English.

Q: But isn't this an interesting issue as you were just saying, the symbolic relationship between the embassy and the government of South Vietnam, I mean how would their own press play such a meeting or did they not?

LAMBERTSON: They probably did not. Their own press counted for very little really. This is an issue that we've faced in other places around the world and that we're facing in spades - John Negroponte is facing - right now in Iraq. How do you conduct yourselves when you have overweening power and authority and yet you're trying to stress the independence and sovereignty of your host government? You've got to really be careful about it, and we were not nearly as careful as we should have been in Saigon, and to some extent that weakened the South Vietnamese government.

Q: The host audience for that is the national citizens.

LAMBERTSON: You bet. The people who see it happening. We needed more than anything else in Vietnam a government that truly commanded the respect and allegiance of the South Vietnamese people, and I doubt that the way we treated the government necessarily contributed to that goal. It goes right to the point of the nature of our role in Vietnam, as it was transformed by us from a supportive one on the periphery of the conflict to being at the very center of that conflict and in fact carrying the main load.

Q: Once you grabbed the metal.

LAMBERTSON: Yes. So, this practice of frequent meetings between the cabinet of an independent and sovereign government and the American Embassy was just a reflection of the way the relationship actually had evolved.

Q: When did that set up start? Had that been going on sometime by the time you got there?

LAMBERTSON: I think it probably had, perhaps not for a long time, but it was certainly not new when I was introduced to it. We'd had a central role in Vietnamese politics since before the overthrow and assassination of Diem. We had just become a little bit too obvious about it.

Q: This would proceed until when? These meetings, in this manner?

LAMBERTSON: I suppose they continued. I don't know if they were still going on in the latter years of our presence in Vietnam, but certainly in '65, '66, '67, that was the routine practice. I'd like to think it stopped after the 1967 election, but I don't recall, or at least that we went to their offices rather than they to ours.

Q: Speaking of routine, I mean here it is '66, '67, the war is being more militarized, but your daily life operating in Saigon was...

LAMBERTSON: Well, particularly after I left the provincial reporting business which did let you sort of brush up against realities and the war in various ways, working in Saigon was like working in a lot of other capitals I suppose. Even in 1966, '67, '68 when Saigon had been...

Q: This is tape two, side A. You were talking about sort of your daily life. What were your living accommodations?

LAMBERTSON: In the spring of '65 after the embassy had been car-bombed, all the dependents in Saigon were sent home so that by the time I got there in July it was a bachelor post. I shared a house with Dick Teare, my language-training partner and Dick was there for a two-year tour as Provincial Reporting Chief. When he left, Spence Richardson became my housemate and we shared that house for another year. I lived in a separate house within a five house compound that had been owned by a French bank. The largest house on the compound was the residence of the political counselor and the others were either political officers or the number two guy in USIS. The political counselor's house had a small swimming pool, which was the site of frequent Sunday afternoon water polo games. George H. W. Bush participated in one of those water polo games once. He was visiting as a newly elected congressman from Houston. He was about 40 years old and looked like he was 25.

Q: In addition to your duties, did you have any off duty interests that you could or did pursue?

LAMBERTSON: No, not really. There were plenty of places to eat and drink in Saigon at night. Tu Do Street was extremely lively. There were quite a number of good places to have a meal. There were always parties to attend, plenty to do after hours, even though our hours tended to be very long. We worked until the early evening routinely. We always worked at least Saturday mornings, often Saturday afternoons, and sometimes Sundays as well. It seemed like the job was kind of always with you, but at the same time you were surrounded by people in the same boat and there was a lot of camaraderie and a lot of fun as I remember.

Q: Now, the ambassador most of that time was Bunker?

LAMBERTSON: I don't recall exactly when Henry Cabot Lodge left and Bunker arrived, but, yes, by sometime in '66 probably, Ellsworth Bunker had arrived in Saigon. A very fine gentleman. I liked him very much.

Q: Did his arrival make any atmospheric difference for the embassy and its work?

LAMBERTSON: I don't recall that it did for me, quite frankly. But I'm sure that people closer to the top felt a difference. His personal style and Henry Cabot Lodge's were quite different. Bunker must have been a much easier man to be around than Henry Cabot Lodge. It seemed to me to be that way at least, and I suspect that was in truth the nature of his personality.

Q: Was this the time that there were deputy ambassadors?

LAMBERTSON: Yes.

Q: How was the embassy organized now by '66 or '67?

LAMBERTSON: Well, there was a deputy ambassador, Sam Berger, and then Bill Porter or perhaps Bill Porter and then Sam Berger.

Q: In NSC?

LAMBERTSON: No, no. That's Sandy. This is Sam.

Q: Okay.

LAMBERTSON: He was a distinguished career Foreign Service Officer. There was beneath the deputy ambassador in the hierarchy, a guy called the "Mission Coordinator," who at first was Phil Chadbourn, a French specialist who spent years as consul general in Marseilles. I think his was kind of an administrative role and not analogous to a DCM. He was more a very senior special assistant perhaps, to the two ambassadors. There was nobody called DCM. The political minister ran the political section. You had very senior talented people in the economic section. Chuck Cooper was the Economic Minister most of the time I was in Saigon; he was an AID star who later did other senior jobs within the administration on the economic side. The station chief was Bill Colby. For a time, Ed Lansdale had his own, sort of parallel political section. The embassy must have had an interesting looking organization chart. There were two MACV chiefs while I was there - MACV was part of the Mission Council even though it was an 800-pound gorilla - William Westmoreland was followed by Creighton Abrams.

Q: Was there a POL/MIL counselor there?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, there was a POL/MIL section in the embassy. That may have been Roger Kirk's job in fact. I said earlier in our conversation that he had been on the external side, but I think he was political-military when he was in Saigon. There were several officers doing that sort of thing with MACV and you can imagine the range of issues that they had to deal with in an operation like that.

Q: In these kinds of very interesting environments, all kinds of sort of unusual circumstances come up. You were telling me about Dick Teare's trip to Hong Kong where he had his own airplane?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, the point I was making was that during the Vietnam War, and I'm sure this is the case right now in Baghdad, resources were not an issue. If something needed to be done and it required calling up a special flight for somebody to do it, that was never a problem. In this particular case, just as an example, a congressional delegation, I think perhaps the one that was led by Mike Mansfield, had come through Saigon. Some record of their conversations was being written up. Or possibly they had asked for an analytical paper of some kind. They wanted to have that as soon as possible. They had moved on to Hong Kong. Dick Teare took the paper in question to them in Hong Kong with his own private jet. This was not particularly unusual. There was an embarrassment of resources. What did the Vietnam War cost us? It's an astounding figure and some small portion of it went for things like that.

Q: One of the other points you were making though is the difference in technology that we might not understand now 40 years later.

LAMBERTSON: That's right. The reason there had to be a paper delivered in Hong Kong was because there was no way to transmit a lengthy document more quickly. Obviously we did not have e-mail. That was 30 years in the future. We did a lot of our provincial reporting by way of typed airgrams.

Q: Which was the green paper, type the report, put it in the pouch.

LAMBERTSON: That's right. I remember it as being yellow, but in any event, it was on paper.

Q: Yes, it was yellow and cables were green.

LAMBERTSON: Everything was cumbersome and quite slow. It was very difficult to make a phone call to Washington. Or should I say it was certainly not routine to make a phone call to Washington, although there was a lot of telephoning done between the embassy and Washington because of the priority of the issue - but it was expensive and not something undertaken lightly.

Q: How about internal communication within the embassy? You had a telephone at your house, did it work?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, telephones as I recall worked pretty well and I don't remember whether we were on the regular Saigon phone system or whether we were knit together in some sort of special system that linked us to the embassy. I quite frankly don't remember that. We may have had two phones.

Q: Did you have individual radios?

LAMBERTSON: No. I don't think I had a radio in my house. If I did I never used it. There may have been one within the compound. The political counselor's house may have had something like that. It was sort of the dark ages as far as modern communication is concerned.

Q: You were in Saigon for the Tet Offensive, which started the evening of January 31, 1968?

LAMBERTSON: Yes.

Q: What was that like?

LAMBERTSON: Well, I distinguished myself at the very beginning of the Tet Offensive by sleeping through it. I'd been out late the night before with Hal Colbaugh and if I heard anything during the night I probably assumed it was Tet fireworks going off. I woke up at the usual time in the morning, turned on the radio to the armed forces radio station, and the announcer was telling everyone that this was not a normal day and that the embassy would not be opening on time inasmuch as it was still occupied by a squad of Viet Cong. So, I got dressed and went next door to the political counselor's house where he was on the phone with Washington and with Allan Wendt, the duty officer who was inside the embassy. There were other people there as well and I was more than a little put out that nobody had seen fit to wake me up. By then Arch Calhoun was the political counselor and he was dealing with the situation, I guess conveying information from Allan Wendt back to the Department via the telephone.

Q: Now, Allan's being in the embassy, the duty officer in the embassy? If you're duty officer, do you go to the embassy?

LAMBERTSON: The duty officer slept in the embassy. There was a room with a bed in it up near the code room and that's where he was when the attack happened. I got to the embassy I think by around 9:00 am, just about the time that Bunker showed up. On the front lawn of the embassy were a number of deceased Viet Cong. The place was a mess, as you can imagine. There weren't shattered windows because some kind of plexiglass window had been used in that building, someone having had this sort of thing in mind. One of the things that quickly changed in the architecture of the place was that the large decorative planters spotted around the lawn of the embassy were removed - they had been very good firing positions for the Viet Cong. They were sort of like concrete lily pads. It was a very strange thing to see. The dead bodies on the lawn. The hole blasted in the perimeter wall. The guard booth where the American GIs had been shot. The mission counselor's house, by then occupied by George Jacobsen, was an old French villa within the embassy compound and it had been the scene of some dramatic action. A Viet Cong soldier, or one or more, was actually going up the stairs ready to dispatch George Jacobsen when one of the marine security guards threw a pistol up to his bedroom window and he caught it and shot the guy as he came in his door. It was that close and there was a picture in Life Magazine of the security officer - it wasn't a marine - it was a security officer, crawling along outside this villa getting ready to throw the gun up to George. Do you remember that?

Q: Yes, as a matter of fact I do. So, people didn't have personal weapons up to that time?

LAMBERTSON: I would have thought Jacobsen would have had. I think he was a retired military officer, but apparently he didn't have one where he needed it. It might have been downstairs. After the Tet Offensive, fighting continued around Saigon sporadically, quite a lot in the days immediately after the Tet Offensive when there was also continued fighting in Nha Trang and of course in Hue. Scattered around Saigon, particularly in Cholon, there were still communist units present and causing havoc. It was easy to get a gun if you wanted one, so I got one at that point, a .38. I kept it beside my bed at night. There were several times in the ensuing weeks when at night it seemed like something was happening right outside my house. At night gunfire can be misleading I think if you're not experienced with it. There were certainly little skirmishes that took place not very far from where I lived. There were also incoming rockets during that period and one of them landed on one of the houses in our compound. Gil Sheinbaum's house across the way. You know Gil?

Q: Why yes. We're currently serving together as Retiree Representatives on the Board of the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA).

LAMBERTSON: Yes, well, ask him about that; although Gil might have left Vietnam by then. So, it was a very strange period. We had seemed to be making a lot of progress in Vietnam, particularly through this political process that we had pushed. The constitution was drafted. It was ratified. A presidential election was held. It was a pretty good electiofree if not entirely fair. Nguyen Van Thieu had won with a plurality of the vote in a multi-candidate contest, monitored by international observers. It was one of the first elections in which that sort of thing was done. When Thieu was inaugurated (our new embassy was dedicated at about the same time), Hubert Humphrey came out for the occasion. That was in November of 1967 and we were beginning to be a little bit optimistic about the prospects for a happy outcome to this whole thing. Then in January of '68 the Tet Offensive took place - less than two months lateand it basically rendered moot anything that had been going on politically in Vietnam and it essentially wrote an end to any possibility of a successful military outcome as well. I would not have imagined in the aftermath of Tet and the aftermath of Lyndon Johnson's decision to not run again that there would have been four more years of pretty intense warfare, as there were, before our withdrawal. Tet fundamentally changed things. It changed the atmosphere in Saigon. I don't recall exactly what I was doing in the political section the last six months that I was there, but I think everybody believed we were just treading water.

Q: Can you give us a better sense of what you mean by a changed atmosphere in Saigon?

LAMBERTSON: Prior to Tet there was, as I said, a feeling that we were on the road to something that could be called a success. The military campaign had been going reasonably well and we were very much encouraged by the political developments that had taken place. It seemed like we, or they, had at last established a really legitimate government that no one could dispute. Maybe we were going to come out all right. I think at the end of 1967 that was a pretty widespread feeling, perhaps not in the country at large, but among those of us in Saigon and probably in Washington. And then came the Tet Offensive - which militarily was a net loss for the communist side. But it represented a huge political victory for them and a tremendous political defeat for us. That was obvious to everyone who was there and it sort of zapped morale.

Q: Because by '68 we had so identified with a specific outcome in Saigon. When you arrived in '64 could we say that we weren't as tightly identified with what was going to happen?

LAMBERTSON: Had I arrived in '64 we could have said that, but I arrived in '65.

Q: Okay, '65.

LAMBERTSON: By which time we already had 65,000 or 70,000 U.S. forces on the ground in Vietnam, mostly up in I Corps, but we were there, we were engaged in combat operations, not just in an advisory role. It probably was already a little bit too late. But by the time Tet '68 rolled around we had well over 500,000 troops in-country.

Q: Now, as you know AFSA keeps an honor roll in the lobby of the Department and on that honor roll there are quite a number of people from this period of Foreign Service Officers killed in Vietnam. Did you know any of those people?

LAMBERTSON: I think the only guy I knew and then only slightly was Dwight Owen, who was a young summer intern in the political section.

Q: We had summer interns?

LAMBERTSON: We had one. He's the only one I remember and I think he perhaps had some connection that enabled him to do it. He was a very bright young man and he was out in the countryside, I think in Binh Dinh province, and he was killed by a mortar. I recall David Engel having a narrow escape from a land mine. He ended up bloodied a bit, but not hurt seriously. Of course there were a number of Foreign Service Officers who were injured in the bombing of the embassy in March of '65 before I got there, including Jim Rosenthal who was badly cut up. Edie Apple, who later became the wife of R.W. Apple of the New York Times, was in the consular section. Eva Kim I think was hurt in that bombing.

Q: Was she there at that time?

LAMBERTSON: Yes.

Q: Okay. '68 is the end of your tour. Did you get extensions or were you given different assignments, because I mean it was a normal two year tour, wasn't it?

LAMBERTSON: I think there was an option for three years with perhaps a home leave thrown in at the middle of the three years. At least I did have a home leave. I was a bachelor and so I had no good reason to make it a two-year tour, which is what it was for Dick Teare. I was there three years, yes.

Q: Okay, how did you get your next assignment?

LAMBERTSON: I thought my next assignment was going to be the Paris Peace Talks which had begun in May of 1968. John Negroponte, who had left the embassy sometime earlier was working in the Paris delegation and I was slated to replace him. Then Cyrus Vance decided that John was too valuable to let go, and therefore I was out of a job temporarily. I'm not sure how my assignment to Indonesia came about, but in any event I went to Indonesia. I was interested in doing that.

Q: The system worked.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, the system worked. I spent two years in Medan.

Q: Via language?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, via language. Six months of Indonesian.

Q: In Washington.

LAMBERTSON: Right. I came back from Saigon in July of '68 and in August of '68 began Indonesian language training. It ended around February or March, and in late March or April, I was in Medan.

Q: Let me ask you this, when you left for the Saigon tour and now you've come back in '68, what does America look like to you? You've been out of the country now for four years during this very intense period.

LAMBERTSON: It was 1968 - a bad year, let's face it. Bobby Kennedy was shot, Martin Luther King was shot, the Democrats had their rollicking convention in Chicago shortly after I got back. Vietnam was very much a part of the political discourse, shall we say, and I had my own views on it and a perspective that I recognized was very different from most people I talked to because I had been there. I saw it from a different angle and I still feel that's true today to some extent. I have yet to see "my" Vietnam movie or really read my Vietnam book. I was staying in an apartment near the State Department and Arch Calhoun came through. He had been sent back from Saigon to work within the administration on a plan to arrange a bombing halt and a start to formal negotiations in Paribefore the election. There had been the "shape of the table" negotiations essentially up to that point and the Administration wanted to push the peace talks onto a new level and do that through a bombing halt. In recent years there have been reports, I believe based on declassified documents, that the Nixon campaign was probably communicating with Nguyen Van Thieu to encourage him to hold out for something better. I read about it all in the newspapers in that summer and fall of '68 and felt very much on the sidelines, but I was intensely interested in it.

Q: Your Vietnam movie, what would that be about?

LAMBERTSON: My Vietnam movie wouldn't be a very good one. But I developed a great respect for a lot of the politicians that I got to know in South Vietnam. I thought them to be genuine nationalists. They were in no sense puppets of the United States. They had real standing in their local constituencies. Many of them had a good deal of moral courage. They disliked the authoritarian government structure that they were operating within. They wanted something better and they were trying to work toward that. They were completely independent of the communists and recognized that communism was even worse. Many of them were from time to time in physical danger or had been in the past. Some of the older ones had been jailed by the French, and then jailed by the communists. They'd paid their dues in a very considerable way. They were going about a serious business trying to save their country and give it a better future, so I had a lot of respect for them as a group. I think what we were trying to do with them was a worthwhile and honorable undertaking. That's what I was doing the last couple of years of my tour and so that's the perspective I took away when I left Vietnam. Wouldn't be a good movie.

Q: There was a political Vietnam.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, there was one and it was a real country and had some real strengths. Political constituencies corresponded generally with provincial boundaries. I believe in both the constituent assembly and the follow-on national assembly, each province had at least one representative and the larger provinces had more. The Buddhists certainly were represented. By 1966, however, the more activist Buddhist leaders had calmed down somewhathey had originally risen up against Diem, of course. Thich Tri Quang was no longer a huge influence, but his group, centered on the An Quang Pagoda, was still important. There was a Catholic-Buddhist split politically in South Vietnam. The Catholics were a minority, but enjoyed disproportionate power in government, the military, etc. not unlike the Sunni minority in Iraq under Saddam. After Diem's overthrow, however, that split became less important. The government was no longer Catholiit was military, unfortunately; I don't even recall the religious persuasion of some of those generals. But it was a fractious, and to some degree fractured, societand it had to cope with a well organized, externally supported insurgency.

If South Vietnam had been given a chancthat is to say if the North Vietnamese had not been fueling the insurgency, and then directly intervening with very large numbers of well equipped troopl think democracy could have taken root. There was a political culture, and there were some talented politicians, many of whom I knew. It could have worked. But under those circumstances, there was no real chance.

Q: You were talking about local leaders. Didn't Lacy Wright marry the wife of a Vietnamese nationalist who was assassinated in the early days?

LAMBERTSON: Possibly. Yes. I was particularly close to a couple of young politicians who were the chief organizers of a small faction within the Constituent Assembly called the National Renaissance Movement. I forget its Vietnamese name, but that's what it meant. They were about my age and attractive young guys with beautiful wives. Sort of courageous and brash and on the dissident side you would say in terms of their political leanings. They were very much against the military government. Their paths diverged completely, I later learned. When I was named ambassador one of them must have seen a reference to me in the newspapers and he wrote to me from Canada. He and I corresponded a little bit. He left for Canada in 1975 and will never return to Vietnam. He's a diehard opponent of the communists and could never imagine accommodating to them in any way. His friend and political ally stayed in Saigon and has made a life for himself. I had indirect contact with him in later years. I never got to see him or talk to him directly, but I heard of him through a third party. He has some sort of business now. His association with the South Vietnamese governing structure landed him in trouble for a few years when the communists took over, but he got through it and is doing okay. Both were, and are, fine men. Another who I did have at least a phone conversation with in 1993 - I was in Saigon in connection with a POW/MIA trip - had been the extremely youthful Minister of Labor when I was in Saigon in 1968. He wasn't much older than I was. Then he was the deputy representative for South Vietnam at the Paris Peace Talks for a time. After that he disappeared from view for years. Nobody knew what had happened to him. It turned out that he had at some point gone back to Vietnam and he, too, by 1993, was doing quite well as a businessman. We had a good conversation. He had managed to adapt himself to the new system, which was probably difficult, but nevertheless he did it.

Q: So, after Vietnam you're kind of off line in Indonesian language training. Was that a big class?

LAMBERTSON: No, we had four people studying Indonesian at that time. John Helble who was about to go out to KL as political counselor. David Kenney who was going to Surabaya and David's wife Helen. Helen was the best of us at the language. She would just cruise through it. I had met Helen in Saigon before David did. She was with the British Council as I recall. Helen was visiting Hue at Tet 1968 and was trapped behind NVA lines for a time. Anyway, that was our Indonesian language class. There was one other fellow, from the Agency. A total of five.

Q: Indonesian in comparison to Vietnamese is fairly easy I understand.

LAMBERTSON: Yes it is.

Q: Very regular.

LAMBERTSON: Non-tonal. Simple grammar. Western alphabet. It's a pretty good combination. I ended up with a 3+/4+.

Q: When did that language reform come through?

LAMBERTSON: It was developed by the Indonesian nationalist movement. It was one of the real achievements of that generation of Indonesian leaders. They basically settled on the easiest language in the archipelago. The default language, I guess you'd call it. They fostered it as a second language for all Indonesians. I think it's been a remarkably successful experiment. So, fortunately, generations of Foreign Service Officers have been able to study Malay rather than Javanese.

Q: Now, during your language class we do have the American elections and a new administration comes on. You're finishing your language class. In one sense you're so low down in the weeds, you're hardly noticed. What's it like to go from the hot house of Saigon to Medan?

LAMBERTSON: It's a little bit like falling off the edge of the earth, because Indonesia in that period was very quiet. The upheaval of September 1967, when Sukarno was essentially removed from the scene and Suharto took over, was far enough in the past that things had settled down and the so-called New Order was firmly in control. Politically I don't think anything was happening. If it was it was very far beneath the surface and probably only in the vicinity of Jakarta. The situation in Sumatra was really very quiet and the emphasis was on rebuilding, on possibilities for economic development, reinvestment in rubber plantations that had been allowed to run down, oil companies stepping up their operations in various places.

Q: What is the rationale for having a consulate in Medan?

LAMBERTSON: It was established there around 1903. It was one of our older Southeast Asian consulates. There was always an American presence up in the northern part of Sumatra because of rubber plantations - Goodyear and Uniroyal. Then eventually oil also became a factor. Oil production on Sumatra dates back a long way. It was what interested the Japanese in getting there in a hurry in World War II. So there was always a fair amount of American investment in Sumatra. There was also a Christian missionary aspect to it I suspect. In Sumatra, the coastal Malays were all Muslims, but in the mountains and in the interior, the Batak population in particular, people were less affected by the Arab merchants who had arrived by boat and spread Islam. So they were ripe for plucking by Christian missionaries. There are an awful lot of Lutherans in North Sumatra, and other denominations as well. That too probably was a reason for a consulate.

Q: How big a post was it? Who else was there with you?

LAMBERTSON: Roger Sullivan was the consul when I arrived. He was replaced a few months later by Mark Dion. Both were top notch. Coleman Parrot was our administrative officer, a fine fellow. I came to like him a lot, and his lovely wife, Julie, who had been a model in London. We had an agency fellow there, and he and his wife became very good friends of mine and are to this day. We had a couple of USIS guys rotate through, and a communicator.

Q: Four or five people? A fairly good sized mission.

LAMBERTSON: Yes. Six in fact.

Q: What were your specific duties?

LAMBERTSON: Oh, I kind of styled myself as a political and economic reporter and I would get in our Jeep and travel as far as the roads would allow me to travel. You could get all the way to central Sumatra, but it was rough going because the roads were just horrendous. They'd once been good, but they'd been neglected for 20 years and had fallen into complete disrepair. Although we had an admin Officer, I think I had some administrative responsibility, taking care of pouches, for example. Very occasionally there would be a consular issue. I dealt with a drunken seaman once, the only time I've had to do that in my Foreign Service career. I signed stuff that the locals prepared for my signature.

Q: If the post had been there for some time, the housing had probably been there for some time. Was it fairly decent housing?

LAMBERTSON: Housing was pretty good. My house was a Dutch bungalow, single story, small lawn, a long row of rooms in a kind of a wing extending off to the back which included my "godown" with my canned goods and all that in it, and rooms for innumerable staff back there. I never knew exactly how many people were living back there. In Saigon I had basically a cook and an old woman who would clean. I thought that was pretty nifty in a rather large house. This was a smaller house, and I had a cook. I had at least two cleaning ladies, one did laundry, the other cleaned. I had my own gate guard, a tubercular man who had been there forever I guess. The extended families of these people lived back there and I'm sure I was never really in control of the situation. But the living was pretty good. Medan was a city of about a million people, but it looked like a small town and a rather pleasant one. Lots of that kind of housing. A rather sizeable foreign community, with Dutch and other Europeans connected to the oil business or the rubber business, mostly the rubber business, or the palm oil business.

There were several other consulates. The British had a consulate there. The Japanese had a consulate. The Soviets had a very big consulate general. We had pretty good relations with them. One of the great triumphs of our time, my time in Medan, was the moon landing. Shortly after the moon landing USIA distributed to all posts those wonderful pictures of the lunar-lander parting from the mother ship and going down to the surface. I don't know if you've ever seen those, but they were spectacular. We invited the Russians over to Roger Sullivan's house for a showing, just to sort of rub it in a little.

Q: That must have meant that you actually had national day celebrations in that community there.

LAMBERTSON: We certainly did. I guess I did two Fourths of July in Medan. Yes, and I wonder how many of those consulates are still left. I'm quite sure the British have closed theirs, but the Japanese may still be there. It's too bad. I'm a proponent of constituent posts. I think closing them is always a loss to the embassy in question and I think it's a loss to the Foreign Service. I think they're great places, especially for younger officers, even though I was bored out of my mind in Medan just because of the contrast with Saigon. Nevertheless, it was a good post and I was very sorry to see that it was closed some years ago. The DCM in Jakarta at the time I was there, who was my reviewing officer, thought constituent posts were irrelevant.

Q: While you were in Medan as you were traveling around you probably talked to Indonesian civil servants, the governor, the local police, that was part of your reporting.

LAMBERTSON: The key person there was the commanding general, and I remember when I was there he was an Ambonese, also a Christian; those sorts of considerations were always borne in mind in the assignment to various areas of Indonesia of these generals. It was well known that North Sumatra was a place where big money could be made. Therefore, there was a rather frequent rotation of generals through Medan so that they could all partake and then move on. But it was also true that at that time, this may no longer be the case in the new democratic Indonesia, but at that time it was basically the army's responsibility to fend for itself, so by no means all the money that was extracted one way or another from rubber plantations and places like that became the personal property of the commanding general. Much of it went to build army barracks and feed the troops. That was the system, but the generals in charge always ended up with some themselves. I might add that I also got to know some military and police generals who were men of the highest integrity. I still keep in touch with one of them.

Q: Another time and place that you were talking about, personal goods in storage. You're living in a city of a million, but it doesn't have American supplies.

LAMBERTSON: That's right. There were stores where if you looked carefully you could find lots of things, but they were probably way outdated and very expensive. Almost everybody in our consulate, and I think this was true of the foreign community in Medan generally, ordered what they needed through mail-order places in Europe. I don't know if you've ever come across any of these. Remember their names? Justesen. That was one that we used.

Q: The Norwegian one has two names.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, it was always a big thing when the container arrived.

Q: Nowadays you see the younger officers aren't going to believe that there isn't a McDonalds on every corner in every city in the world and how we got our personal goods - your laundry, your canned goods, your whatever will come as a surprise. In fact you had to order them from Europe which meant ordering in advance.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, it certainly did and not necessarily ordering well, especially when you are a bachelor and you don't know anything about putting a house together or what makes it run or what you really need. I got a lot of advice from a couple of wives in the consulate.

Q: Let's go ahead and take a break. You were saying Galbraith was coming up for a visit.

LAMBERTSON: I was alone in Medan almost literally. I think Mark Dion was in Singapore for a weekend. Coleman Parrot, our administrative officer was away. I got a phone call from Jakarta saying that the ambassador was going to be coming up there in a matter of just a few days. It was on very short notice, an ambassadorial visit. A big deal for us in Medan. It was akin to the Secretary of State arriving at an embassy, relatively speaking. We had a good deal of preparation to do - basically arranging a dinner and an overnight trip out to a rubber plantation and that kind of thing. I got most of that done by the time Mark returned. He was very grateful and we had a successful visit. The ambassador as I recall had a large entourage, in the neighborhood of a dozen people. I never did that to a consulate in Thailand

Q: Did he come commercial or did he come on a military attachï¿½ airplane?

LAMBERTSON: I think he came by commercial aircraft. There was a pretty regular connection between Medan and Jakarta. It's possible he came by attachï¿½ aircraft, but if so some of his people must have come commercial.

Q: Each tour you have you're increasing your own skills and you're observing the other officers around you. What was it like to work for Roger Sullivan?

LAMBERTSON: Very good. Roger Sullivan was a brilliant Foreign Service Officer I thought, a China specialist, a man very skeptical that anything good was going to come out of Vietnam and who thought we should have cut our losses there long before. Therefore, he and I had disagreements about that subject and he was always a very convincing advocate for his point of view. I seldom got the best of him in any discussion about Vietnam. He was a good boss, easy to get along with. I enjoyed traveling with him. He had a very nice family and I was sort of welcomed by them all. I liked him very much. He received his promotion to FSO-3 while he was there - this under the old system and he was a member - I guess not a member of the senior Foreign Service as an old FSO-3, but at least it was a good promotion. He thought it would open up lots of doors for him.

Q: That's your opening, mid-level, promotion. Three is now either a one or a five, I forgot which way the system went.

LAMBERTSON: Three is now a one.

Q: Okay. Yes, exactly. That would be '70 and that would be the start of some interesting things on the China side and he then later got involved in those things. All good things have to come to an end and the Medan tour is over.

LAMBERTSON: The spring of '71.

Q: Yes, how do you get, when does that cable come in that says here's your next job?

LAMBERTSON: I honestly don't remember what I did or exactly who I was in contact with to make sure that my next job was the Paris Peace Talks. I don't know that I actually went after that job with great fervor or whether it was offered to me, but I was happy to have it. I would have preferred to have gone there directly from Saigon in 1968, but going there in 1971 also interested me. I was surprised, I suppose, that the Talks were still going on in 1971. I left Medan in the spring of 1971, and traveled to Paris by way of Tunisia where I visited Arch Calhoun, my former boss in Saigon. I got to Paris, it must have been in April of '71, although I then went back to the United States and then turned around and returned to Paris.

The Paris Peace Talks by then had been going on for three years and not a whole lot had been accomplished. The American delegation by that time was led by David Bruce who I came to respect and admire, a very fine gentleman I thought. His deputy was Phil Habib. So, I was once again in familiar territory. Steve Ledogar was the press spokesman, Peter Collins, who had been with me in Saigon, was a liaison officer and that is what I also became. I was also the admin guy for the delegation the first year I was there, which entailed occasional arguments with people in the embassy in Paris over such issues as whether we could continue to use their spacious library. If you've ever been in the embassy in Paris you know they have a marvelous paneled library - a wonderful room. We used that library again in 1989 when I was in Paris for a conference on Cambodia. In any event I had some administrative responsibility, but not that much. Then we had a change in leadership in the delegation after I'd been there a few months. David Bruce left, and William Porter, the former deputy ambassador in Saigon, former ambassador to Algeria and at that time ambassador to Korea came from Seoul to replace Bruce as head of the delegation.

Q: That change representing?

LAMBERTSON: Then Phil Habib went to Seoul to replace Bill Porter as ambassador to Korea.

Q: Is that a normal rotation of people?

LAMBERTSON: David Bruce was a high-profile political appointee on the order of an Ellsworth Bunker, and appointing William Porter, however distinguished his career might have been, represented a slight diminution in the status of the post. I suppose that's because by then Henry Kissinger was engaged in his own line of negotiation and really didn't much care what happened in Paris, except that it was an operation we had to keep going because the North Vietnamese themselves demanded that it continue. So, Porter became the chief of the delegation. Phil left. Heyward Isham replaced Phil and became the deputy. Steve Ledogar left and I became the press spokesman for the delegatioa far more interesting job for me than being liaison officer and general factotum.

I might add that something else happened at about that time which was somewhat significant in my lifI married Sacie and acquired three wonderful stepchildren. Whatever success I enjoyed subsequently, I owe to her, at least mostly. That was in the summer of '72.

So for the last year, roughly, that I was there I was the spokesman for the delegation. That meant participating in a four-way, on-the-record press conference following each plenary session of the Paris Talks, which always took place on Thursday afternoons at the Hotel Majestic near the Arc de Triumph.

Q: Four way, so American...?

LAMBERTSON: North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Viet Cong - called the "Provisional Revolutionary Government" - and ourselves.

Q: Of course, this is a big thing for the press, especially American...

LAMBERTSON: That's right. The Paris press corps during the Vietnam Peace Talks was much larger than before or since in terms of American representation and probably in terms of other foreign representation also. When the Peace Talks ended in January of '73 an awful lot of American newspapers closed up shop in Paris. Many of the correspondents there had been with the subject since it began in May of 1968 and at least some of them had a very good knowledge of the way the talks had developed, the history of what had gone on, in a way that I really did not. Therefore, they could be formidable questioners in a press conference situation.

Q: Actually it's a daunting job to handle the press. Richard Boucher seems to have permanently ensconced himself into that. As you say you must have gotten some tough questions or slid off the podium once or twice?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, because the press corps was inclined to be highly skeptical of any of our claims and critical of our position. Certainly that was true of the foreign press and also true of some of the American press. What made it especially difficult was that I was not an "authoritative" spokesman because Henry Kissinger was doing secret negotiations while we were having our open plenary sessions and the two could quite often diverge. The subject of our plenary sessions sometimes, often, had nothing to do with what Henry was talking about. Our talks had basically become exchanges of polemics, which as I mentioned the North Vietnamese considered very valuable. This was a weekly opening to the world for them. That's why they wanted it to continue even though the real business was being done between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho. As 1972 wore on and Kissinger's activities became more and more open, or less and less secret should I say, my job as spokesman got harder.

In the beginning Kissinger would come and go into Paris, and no one would know he'd been there except perhaps the head of our delegation. His travels were arranged by the defense attachï¿½ in Paris, who later became chief of the CIA, General Walters, Vernon Walters. He handled Henry's clandestine movements in and out of Paris.

By the summer of '72 it was well known that Kissinger was engaged in these talks. By the fall of '72 his arrivals in Paris were no longer a secret although they weren't advertised, but people knew he was there. Still later on there were motorcycle paparazzi chasing him around as his motorcade moved from one point to another. It became gradually more and more an open thing. As it did, and as correspondents were clued in at least in a general way from briefings in Washington and elsewhere about what was going on in the private talks, I'd get interesting questions directed at me on these Thursday afternoon occasions and I seldom knew any more than the journalists did about what might have happened.

I was really under a constraint. I was not supposed to say anything about Henry Kissinger's activities - how dare I. On a few occasions when I did, my wrist was slapped and I was told not to do it again. I once ventured to characterize, for example, the "tone" of Henry's meeting the previous day. I was informed that Kissinger was displeased, and that so was Le Duc Tho, and that I should desist. It was an untenable position for a press spokesman, when you don't really know what's going on and you're not even allowed to say what you do know - and you're dealing with a press corps that knows about as much as you do.

I would also often get into exchanges having to do with American military operations in Vietnafor example, whether or not a flood control dike with an anti-aircraft position on top of it was or was not a legitimate military target. One of my worst hecklers was the Australian communist writer, Wilfred Burchett. I was frankly relieved when my press spokesmanship ended, although I had appreciated the temporary notoriety it gave me. My mother occasionally saw me on the nightly news.

Q: It certainly must have been different, given the initiative and challenge of being in Vietnam and then to be totally circumscribed. I mean you can't get two more different ends of the whole Foreign Service experience.

LAMBERTSON: I suppose that's right. It was just a function of the fact that the real negotiation was taking place elsewhere. The press was constantly probing to see if they could get any insight through this one channel available to them into the still essentially secret process. I may have been circumscribed, but the job most certainly was challenging.

Q: Speaking of insights, you were saying at one time Kissinger came through town and he briefed a group of Embassy officers?

LAMBERTSON: Kissinger and Dick Smyser came through, and I suppose Winston Lord must have been with him also. He met with our delegation and he talked with us about his visit to South Vietnam, during which I think he was trying to get Nguyen Van Thieu to agree to more forthcoming formulations that he could use in his secret talks. He also discussed at some length his stopover in Pakistan and briefed us on the situation on the subcontinent, in which I had no interest. I couldn't understand why he felt it necessary to talk about that subject. Then he left. He neglected to mention that he had also gone from Pakistan into Beijing, secretly. William Porter was in on his secret, but nobody else in the delegation was. Vernon Walters probably knew about it also. We read about it in the papers a couple of days later.

Q: The talks finally do come to some resolution though, right?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, in October of 1972 Kissinger had his "peace is at hand" press conference. One of those brilliant performances he was capable of. There were some snags between that point and the final agreement, which caused us to unleash B-52s over North Vietnam at Christmas 1972. We got an agreement then, finally, in January of 1973. William Rogers, our Secretary of State, came to Paris to sign the agreement. Kissinger had earlier initialed the agreement with Le Duc Tho. We had an elaborate ceremony on, what was it, January 25, 23, something like that, 1973 ending American participation in the Vietnam War. Our withdrawal began immediately and POWs returned within the next month. South Vietnam was more or less on its own.

Q: In fact, did you leave Paris shortly after this? I mean that must have been the end of the Peace Talks delegation.

LAMBERTSON: Porter left, but the delegation was to become the core of a joint economic commission. I don't know if you remember that about the Vietnam Peace Talks. We were going to give them lots of aid had this agreement worked out, and a joint commission was to be established as part of the agreement and was to begin its meetings immediately in Paris. So the delegation remained more or less intact, but as I recall I had very little to do. By early April my family and I were on a six week tour of Southern Europe, and shortly after we got back, I left Paris. Needless to say the joint economic commission, if that indeed was the name, never amounted to anything. My work ended essentially in January.

Q: You started working on landing the next job. Did you call them or did they call you?

LAMBERTSON: It was time for me to go back to Washington. I hadn't served in Washington in a real job since that disastrous first assignment. Again, I can't remember whether somebody asked me to come back and be a sort of junior policy officer in EA/RA (Office of Regional Affairs in the East Asia Bureau) or whether I knew it was available and lobbied to get it. Maybe a little of both. By then I was comfortable with the East Asia Bureau. I had begun to make a name for myself within the Bureau and it's possible that I knew enough about the flow chart that I was able to identify that job and maneuver myself into it. In any event, I went to EA/RA in the spring of 1973.

Q: Who was the head of regional affairs?

LAMBERTSON: Bob Martens. His deputy was Dick Nethercut, another China guy, right? Both good men.

Q: Yes.

LAMBERTSON: Oh and Louise McNutt was in the office. Do you know her or do you know who she was?

Q: She was there forever, wasn't she?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, forever. She was the daughter of Governor Paul McNutt of Indiana, who was one of FDR's great political rivals within the Democratic Party and had been sent off to the Philippines as Governor General to sort of get him out of FDR's way. So Louise spent her girlhood in the governor's mansion in Manila, at least a few years of it. A wonderful woman with an office piled high with every UN publication that had ever been cranked out. One time our Pentagon liaison told her he had hidden a secret document in her bookshelves, and she would have to find it. Louise was wonderful.

Q: But isn't that the point, the regional affairs office in the State Department bureaus, I don't want to say was the "pick up" office, but they covered the broader, intra-regional issues.

LAMBERTSON: It was a collection of very disparate functions. Louise was our United Nations officer and I think was pretty good at knowing what was happening at the UN and how it might affect what we were doing. There was a POL/MIL function - the guy in EA/RA kind of liaised with PM as well as with the individual country offices. Harriet Isom was in the office, in fact, I replaced her, and one of my functions was "SEATO affairs".

Q: Oh, goodness.

LAMBERTSON: We had a vault, the "SEATO vault," as if something secret had been produced that required being kept in a vault. I think during my tenure that job ended and the vault was cleaned out. SEATO was officially put to rest.

Q: What are your responsibilities? You're a fourth tour officer now?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, my title was "policy officer" and I did have an actual policy-related job, which was to design and disseminate to the field - and hope for cooperation from the field - annual policy analysis and resource allocation documents. Do you remember those things? PARA was one acronym for them and they had others as the years went by. They were taken seriously by some posts and not at all seriously by others. It was my job to put the thing together, to get it out to the field, to keep track of who had responded and who hadn't and to do whatever we had to do with it when the submission was made. Dave Osborn was the ambassador in Burma at that time, and he really took it seriously. He thought it ought to be redesigned, and he reportedly spent hours with his office floor covered with papers and flow charts, and he sent in something that was quite interesting that I'm sure nobody really looked at. He probably had time on his hands in Rangoon.

Then, as 1973 moved into 1974, Vietnam was beginning to fail and the frailty and the flaws in the Paris Agreement on Vietnam were becoming more and more evident and the North Vietnamese military had moved into the South in a big way. They were putting pressure on Saigon on many fronts and it was pretty clear that things were headed down the drain. This continued to be a major preoccupation of the bureau, of course, and I got drawn back into the Vietnam business from my EA/RA position. I was interested in what was happening and put myself forward and was increasingly involved in writing papers related to the situation and writing congressional presentations, all that sort of thing. By the second half of 1974 I was probably working on Vietnam more than anything else.

John Helbe was Phil Habib's special assistant. Phil being the Assistant Secretary at this point. One of my more vivid experiences while in EARA was attending the 1974 chiefs of mission meeting in Honolulu, December of '74. I went there, I guess technically, because I was the policy officer and we were supposed to be talking to ambassadors about those PARA documents.

Q: Now a chiefs of mission meeting, isn't that where the ambassadors from that region all get together and share their experiences hopefully with the thought that one person's experience is going to improve the others' performance.

LAMBERTSON: That's right. For years it had been traditional to do it in Honolulu in December. That was still the practice when I was in Bangkok. I'm not sure whether budgetary or other things have interrupted that tradition, probably so. In any event I went to that meeting. As I said, I had a faint excuse theoretically because of my titular job as policy officer, but I really went there because of the Vietnam aspect of it. We knew that Vietnam was going to be an important agenda topic and John Helble was good enough to make sure that I got on the airplane.

I remember it quite vividly - at least I remember the tenor of the exchanges that took place on the subject of Vietnam. Particularly at a Sunday morning discussion we had at a private estate right on the ocean, on the North shore of Oahu. Some rich person's place had been given over to us for the day. We went out there by helicopter and sat around the pool and the subject was primarily Vietnam and Cambodia. Although the day started with a briefing by a guy from the EB (Economics) bureaMike Ely maybe - on the 1974 trade act, an important new piece of legislation. When the discussion turned to Vietnam there was a lot of tension in the air because of the bitter feelings of Graham Martin toward Phil Habib and toward Washington.

Graham Martin was quite sure that Washington could and should be doing more to help our friends in South Vietnam. Phil Habib was explaining to him and to the others assembled around the pool the political realities of 1974 in the United States, particularly after the election of an overwhelmingly more Democratic, young and very anti-war House of Representativethe so-called "class of '74." So, I was aware of the problem that existed between Graham Martin and Phil Habib because I guess it was semi-public, but John Helble also kind of kept me up to date, describing the occasional telegram that I wouldn't have seen from Graham Martin to Phil. Martin seemed to be convinced that Washington generally and Phil in particular could be doing more than was being done to stem the tide. John Gunther Dean was also present and he had equally gloomy things to say about the situation in Cambodia.

Q: I wonder about some of the other observers, I think Kintner would have been there from Thailand and Ambassador Unger would have been there from the Republic of China.

LAMBERTSON: I don't recall what they had to say in the Vietnam discussion. I don't remember details of the discussiojust the atmospherics of it. I do remember Ambassador Unger arriving with a briefing book that must have been six inches thick, literally. Such a detail guy. A very nice man, but I couldn't believe it when I saw this thing he was carrying around with him.

Q: The China God does its work.

LAMBERTSON: He didn't want to leave anything to chance when it came to having what he needed with him.

Q: So, actually, what you're really saying here is that domestic political changes have occurred that will impact on the conduct of foreign policy or what one can do in foreign policy?

LAMBERTSON: Oh, absolutely.

Q: It goes back to Clauswitz, if the public doesn't support you, you're in trouble.

LAMBERTSON: That's right, and by then the public had generally stopped supporting this effort.

Q: Your vantage point is regional affairs. The public support stops and still that's a hard thing to watch. I mean you had been there. You had Vietnam experience, but now you're working with the Hill, you're doing papers.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, as I said, in 1974 there'd been an influx of new almost exclusively anti-war Democrats into the House. I went with Phil Habib one afternoon to a large room in the capitol building where we met with the House Democratic caucus. It couldn't have been all of them. I don't think there were 250 people in the room, but there were an awful lot, including people like Phil Burton of San Francisco, Bella Abzug and Patsy Mink. Just outrageously outspoken people. It was a very tough meeting. I wasn't doing the talking, Phil was. I was just his spear-carrier. It was a kind of an eye opener to be in the same room with that much anti-war sentiment all at one time. It felt good to escape from it. That was indicative of the atmosphere. We were asking, incidentally, for $750 million more in military aid in the spring of 1975 for Saigon. In 1975 that was real money, you know. Congress was not inclined to provide any.

Q: That's certainly one of the lessons that you ultimately learned in this business: whatever policy you're pursuing has to be publicly acceptable, but most Foreign Service Officers to a fourth assignment don't get a real live exposure to those political currents.

LAMBERTSON: We were all exposed to those currents with respect to Vietnam, at least after I left Saigon in 1968 and as the situation worsened. You couldn't be unaware of the political reality surrounding the Vietnam issue. But it was interesting to brush up against it first hand as I did quite a lot in the spring of 1975, going up to the Hill with Phil and also a couple of times as part of Kissinger's entourage for those huge hearings of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees.

Q: Ultimately Saigon falls April 30, 1975.

LAMBERTSON: Right, I was in the Ops Center that night.

Q: Coincidentally or...?

LAMBERTSON: I'm sure it was not coincidental. The bureau must have had some kind of special watch going on.

Q: You could see it coming. It wasn't just that day.

LAMBERTSON: It wasn't just that day, but a number of days leading up to it. I remember sitting in a small room with Phil and with Larry Eagleburger that night, and I have a copy someplace of Saigon's last telegram, signing off. Also, during that period when it became evident that Saigon was going down the tubes, there was a lot of preliminary work that got underway on the refugee front and I was in on some of it. Frank Wisner was a prime mover in that. I forget where Frank was working at that point. A number of people were involved. I met with them a couple of times, and we were talking in a preliminary way about how this likely large influx of people was going to be handled, before it became an official government project. Then after the fall of Saigon, I remember going with Phil and Wisner to a hearing before Ted Kennedy's subcommittee. He had a subcommittee that had to do with refugee issues. Do you remember that?

Q: No, because I always have refugees starting with...

LAMBERTSON: He had a guy by the name of Jerry Tinker. Do you remember that name?

Q: Yes, that sounds familiar.

LAMBERTSON: Jerry was a classmate of mine at Redlands and he was for years Kennedy's staffer on refugee issues. Kennedy chaired a hearing on...

Q: We had Cuban refugees and all that sort of stuff.

LAMBERTSON: ...on preparations for handling the exodus from Vietnam. Then about the last thing Vietnam-related that I did and about the last thing I did in EA/Rthat must have been within a week of the fall of Saigon - we got a memo from Brent Scowcroft, a Scowcroft-Springsteen memo in which the Department was asked to provide the White House a paper on the "lessons of Vietnam." I became the chief author of that and I collected a lot of views from people in the bureau. Everybody had things to say. I wrote that memo, Bob Miller cleared it and Phil signed it and it went back through the Springsteen-Scowcroft channel. I got a copy a few years later and have since acquired a legitimate declassified copy through the FOI process. It's a good memo - the sort of thing we might have done well to read carefully before our latest adventure in the Middle East.

Q: Let me take you back to a couple of things that you've mentioned. Planning ahead for refugees. There's a tension here between it-ain't-going-to-happen-and-even-if-it-is-you-don't-want-to-make-preparations-because-you'll-make-it-happen and the need to plan to ahead.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, and so there were these informal meetings that took place, and I was kind of on the margins of those as I said.

Q: There wasn't a refugee bureau at that time.

LAMBERTSON: Is that right?

Q: I'm fairly certain. It comes to me as a result of all this.

LAMBERTSON: It probably came about in the Carter administration, right?

Q: Yes. I think so. One of the things that...

LAMBERTSON: After 1977.

Q: This is tape three. We were discussing post-fall of Saigon refugee thinking. You were saying that policy initiation was at a different level than you. You were on the side, so who was thinking refugees?

LAMBERTSON: Well, not necessarily on a different level, but I wasn't as intimately involved as people like Lionel Rosenblatt and I think Frank Wisner and a few other guys who really did a lot to lay the groundwork for what became a plan.

Q: Now the ultimate circumstance they faced was rescuing people at sea, getting them to the Philippines, arranging for countries of first asylum to accept the refugees. I mean that was a major effort there, but yet let's see you actually come out of regional affairs shortly after the fall of Saigon, so?

LAMBERTSON: I shifted gears very soon thereafter, and I was never directly involved in the big refugee program, other than that we had a Vietnamese refugee family living with us for a few months that fall and winter.

Q: You were saying you were in the Ops Center with Larry Eagleburger when the news comes over. What did the room feel like?

LAMBERTSON: Well, it wasn't a "you could have heard a pin drop" type situation. Everybody knew what was happening and undoubtedly everybody had their own thoughts on the subject as that last telegram came in. I remember Phil and Larry Eagleburger reacting quite normally to the evening's events, as they both were inclined to do, with very little phasing them. To me it was a huge thing.

Q: It brought down the curtain.

LAMBERTSON: Yes. It was a very moving and emotional evening for me and I'm sure for lots of people.

Q: So, now having spent all your time overseas, you can't get out of Washington. Your next assignment is to the Japan desk?

LAMBERTSON: It actually worked pretty well for me. I'd gotten married when we were in Paris and I acquired three stepchildren, so it was rather good for us to establish ourselves as a family and have a semi-normal life in the Washington, D.C. area, in Alexandria, Virginia, from the summer of '73 until the summer of '77. In '75 after two years in EA/RA I joined the Japan desk. That was a very good move for me. I'm extremely glad I did it.

In that case it was Bill Sherman, the Country Director, it was Bill Sherman's initiative. He came to me and asked me if I would be interested in becoming deputy director of the Japan desk. I certainly was. I wanted to broaden my horizons. Japan loomed larger in our thinking then than it seems to in 2004. Bill Sherman was a man that I had gotten to know a little bit and I admired him, so I was very happy to move around the corner in the bureau to the Japan desk.

Q: Now, you're deputy director?

LAMBERTSON: Right.

Q: A deputy directorship is a major assignment in the State Department, so he obviously had a very high opinion of you.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, I think he did and I appreciated that at the time, and I've always appreciated Bill's tutelage and mentoring - all of that that he provided over the years to me. He was the best Foreign Service boss I ever had. Quiet, soft spoken, very wise in the ways of bureaucracy, wonderfully knowledgeable about Japan and policy toward Japan and policy toward lots of other things, and just a very good teacher. It was a great opportunity for me.

Q: How big was the Japan desk at this time?

LAMBERTSON: It was quite small. Six officers and three secretaries; might have been seven officers, but certainly no more than that.

Q: It would be split into economic and political sections and maybe a consular officer?

LAMBERTSON: Right. Yes, I think we had a POL/MIL specialist.

Q: POL/MIL specialist, right.

LAMBERTSON: For the security relationship.

Q: Okinawa had gone through some...

LAMBERTSON: By then, Okinawa was once again fully part of Japan. I joined the desk just a few weeks in advance of the visit to the United States by Emperor Hirohito which was a very big deal in U.S.-Japan relations, and significant in U.S.-Japan history I think. A tremendous amount of preparation had gone into that visit as you can imagine. The Japanese being as careful as they are about anything like that and doubly so when the emperor was involved. It was a highly choreographed operation, but there was very good symbolism to it. I think it in a sense put a final "period" to one important phase in U.S.-Japan history.

Q: Were there particular highlights that one side or the other wanted in the schedule as particularly symbolic or were both sides pretty much on the same track, oh yes, he should see this, he should do that?

LAMBERTSON: I don't remember any particular controversies over the schedule. He was elderly at that time of course. We had a wonderful welcoming ceremony on the South Lawn and that was followed by a reception in the East Room of the White House. Sacie and I just made the cut for that event. We went through a receiving line and shook hands with the Emperor of Japan, which no Japanese could have ever imagined doing. Then that evening we didn't qualify for the State dinner, but we did qualify for the "after dinner entertainment" which meant white tie and tails and fancy dresses for the ladies. We were ushered in through the south portico and went upstairs, as I remember, to the main north entrance to the White House where once again there was a receiving line, where we once again shook hands with the emperor. Then there was a little orchestra and there was dancing right there on the marble foyer in the White House. Gerald Ford took the floor first with Ginger Rogers, who was a little long in the tooth but still very graceful on the dance floor, as was Gerald Ford, so it was a great evening, a great day.

The substantive issue that I remember most from that job, 1975 to 1977, was the so-called Lockheed scandal. Lockheed or its agents had allegedly attempted to bribe some Japanese politicians to improve prospects for the sale of, probably, the P-3 (anti-submarine warfare aircraft) and it became a huge scandal in Japan. There were reverberations back across the Pacific. Frank Church, who was chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, seized the issue and held hearings on it. I think there was an investigation of some kind that preceded the hearings, and I got very much involved in the Department's response to that whole process. It included among other things passing information back and forth between the Japanese government and the congress. We were sort of the conduit for information requests from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which were conveyed to us by Chuck Meissner, the late Chuck Meissner. Moose and Meissner, remember?

Q: Oh, I thought it was Moose and Lowenstein?

LAMBERTSON: Well, it was Moose and Meissner at first. He was an assistant secretary of commerce in the Clinton Administration and was on Ron Brown's airplane in Yugoslavia, unfortunately. Anyway, Meissner was the staffer involved and I was the middle man, and the Japanese Embassy officer involved was a good fellow by the name of Kazuo Ogura, who became a very senior Gaimusho (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) official. As a result of all that, the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act was born.

We had visits by Japanese prime ministers as always happens. There were two of them during my two years, two different prime ministers. I was involved in those visits. Prime Ministers Miki and Fukuda.

Q: That's LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) prime ministers, still?

LAMBERTSON: Oh, yes.

Q: Prime ministers. Was there any particular significance to that political change?

LAMBERTSON: I don't recall. I think it was essentially internal LDP politics.

I remember flying on Fukuda's airplane from Washington to San Francisco on his return to Japan. Evan Dobelle was also on that airplane and I sat next to him. He was the chief of protocol under Jimmy Carter. I guess this was very early Carter Administration. This would have been early '77. We landed in San Francisco and were met by the city's chief of protocol, Cyril Magnin of the I. Magnin department store family. He was a very nice, elderly gentleman and had been doing this for years. He organized the San Francisco portion of Fukuda's visit. I rode in from the airport with George Moscone, the mayor of San Francisco, who was an attractive guy. He was killed not long after in the Harvey Milk shooting incident. We had dinner at a fancy hotel and Cyril Magnin I think was a little embarrassed because the evening was so dominated by San Francisco's Italians, not only Moscone, but a lot of other people whom he considered a little bit nouveau riche and not very sophisticated. His reaction was amusing. It was a nice event.

Q: Is that fairly typical for the deputy director to escort a prime minister?

LAMBERTSON: Oh, I don't know how typical it is. It was just something that Bill Sherman let me do. I wasn't "escorting" the Prime Minister, but I was a member of his party.

Q: You were traveling commercially?

LAMBERTSON: We were traveling on a chartered Japan Air Lines (JAL) aircraft. It was Fukuda's personal plane.

Q: So, there were certainly enough Japanese embassy people there, too?

LAMBERTSON: Yes.

Q: Sitting in Washington you must, and having done it in the field, the presidential visit, you must have looked out the window and thought "I know what the embassy, the Japanese embassy guys are going through."

LAMBERTSON: That's right, although I guess up to then I had not done a presidential visit. I did my only presidential visit in fact in Japan in 1979.

Q: Now, when you're on the desk you had the opportunity, which is fairly typical at that time of making an orientation trip to your post. Had you not been stationed in Japan, you probably passed through Japan to get to Saigon because that's a great circle route and all that. What did your introduction to Japan, how did that strike you in October of '76? You went to Honolulu first, you probably saw the CINCPAC people?

LAMBERTSON: Yes. I first visited Japan in 1965 on an R&R from Saigon. You could do that sort of thing. I flew into Tachikawa air base, which by 1976 had been closed down. Japan in 1965 was still a far cry from an economic super power. It was interesting to go back and see it again in 1976. I was impressed by the sense of power that you felt around you in Tokyo, sort of a pulsing energy and the same kind of feeling you get in some other Asian cities now - the same sort of feeling you get now in Beijing, and in Tokyo, still. Things are happening, really moving.

I spent a good deal of time with Nick Platt, because by then I knew I would be replacing him the following summer. I met many of the people at the Gaimusho (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) who I would later get to know very well. I went with Nick to a couple of Gaimusho-hosted dinners in cozy little Japanese restaurants, with serving girls, the modern equivalent of geishaunbelievably expensive evenings I'm sure, but Gaimusho funds at that time seemed to be unlimited. I talked with lots of people in the embassy, in all sections. I'm sure I met people from USFJ, although I don't recall specifics. I visited Sapporit turned out to be my only trip to Hokkaido, unfortunately. A fascinating place, I thought, a distinct variant of Japanese culture. I was hosted there by Larry Farrar, the consul general, as I was a few days later by the ConGen in Naha. One of the things I remember from the Naha visit was looking out over the plain and the sea from the consul general's residence and watching an SR-71 circling to lanit no doubt having just returned from a run along the DMZ in Korea. I stopped in Honolulu on the way out for a briefing and I'm sure I paid a courtesy call on the Admiral. I stopped in San Francisco on the way back where I met my parents. We had a nice few days together, touring wine country among other places. During my absence, Carter had beaten Ford.

Q: At this point you're on a desk in Washington at the time of a change in administrations. My experience is this is the time of drafting transition papers where recent history and policies are summed up. How did that process sweep through the Japan desk?

LAMBERTSON: I don't remember specific papers quite frankly, Dave, but I know that was the process. Everybody did it. "Where are we going" kinds of papers for the new guy coming in. I think we learned fairly early on that our new guy was going to be Dick Holbrooke.

Q: Old Saigon friends getting together?

LAMBERTSON: I suppose. Actually I was happy to leave the bureau when Dick came in. Partly, perhaps, because I still considered him a peer and felt uncomfortable about the idea of his being my big boss. Partly also because his style bothered ma little too aggressive for my taste. I was pretty well convinced that I'd be better off watching his performance from a distance. Japan seemed about right.

Q: You're doing these papers. I guess what I wanted to ask was there any particular policy that you thought needed to be highlighted as you passed things on to your replacement or was Japan fairly stable at that time. I know the reversion of Okinawa had earlier been a very major event.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, that was done and I think in 1977 the relationship was in pretty stable condition. Indeed during the entire time I was in Japan it seemed to me that it fundamentally was. I had an interesting job there because I was dealing with foreign policy issues, but the bilateral relationship was steady, and in good shape. We had just appointed Mike Mansfield; that happened before I left the desk in the spring of 1977. That met with everyone's great acclaim. I thought he was a wonderful choice.

Mansfield had first visited Japan in the '20s, as a young Marine returning from China. He had a lifelong interest in Asia and in addition was a distinguished political leadeSenate Majority Leader longer than anyone else before or since. He was a man of great ag75 or so at the timwhich alone was enough to earn him the respect of the Japanese. And as I got to know him, which I was lucky enough to do, I admired his modesty, his unassuming nature, his warmth. All of those qualities made him a wonderful ambassador. One of his favorite phrases was that the U.S.-Japan relationship was "the most important bilateral relationship in the world, bar none." That might have been an arguable proposition, but Mansfield believed it, and so did I.

I have a photo of him over there on the wall, with a very generous inscription. One of my favorite souvenirs.

Q: I was going to say one of the things that happens in Washington at that presidential transition time, you do the transition papers as a handoff and then you often get a new ambassador, particularly Japan haa long line of outstanding political leaders, that's a political appointee job. The desk has a major responsibility to Mansfield in his hearings; to brief him up. Do you go to him or is there an office at the Japan desk? How is he introduced to the Foreign Service?

LAMBERTSON: I don't know that we had an office for him, but he came into the Japan desk a number of times during that period. I had the good fortune of going around town with him to call on various people. The Undersecretary of the Treasury. Bob Strauss, who was the Special Trade Representative at the time. Commerce Secretary, I don't remember who that was. I went with Mansfield on all those Washington calls and he was a wonderful man to be around. I also went with him up to the Hill, where his Senate colleagues gave him a going away reception in a room in the Capitol. It was very nice, to see him lionized by his peers as he was. I felt very privileged to witness that. I really liked Mansfield and I got to know him pretty well in my three years in Japan, and kept up with him at least occasionally in the years that followed. I called on him in his downtown office not too long before he died. I admired him very much, and I appreciated having an opportunity to work for him and get acquainted with him.

Q: Those are major responsibilities of the desk, the transition stuff, the new ambassador. Mansfield obviously had done a lot of traveling, he knows the Foreign Service, so he probably felt very comfortable coming onboard. As you said, your next move is from the desk as deputy chief of the political section of the embassy in Tokyo. Tokyo's expensive. Why did you want to go there?

LAMBERTSON: Well, really it was a great job, because Japan was and is an important country and we have such very important relations with them. There was a need for, for want of a better term, "coordination," so that we could speak with the same voice toward third-country issues, international issues. So the external affairs portfolio, which was what I had in addition to my title as deputy, was a really good one. It meant that I worked with the Gaimusho on a daily basis, and I developed great respect for the Gaimusho and its ability to represent Japan to the world, and respect for the individual talent of so many of its officers, especially the ones in the American affairs track, who were the best. There were many young Foreign Service Officers in middle grades and some at sort of the early senior level with whom I worked directly and who later rose to the top of the Japanese Foreign Service. Ambassadors to Washington and vice ministers and things like that.

The other reason it was a good job was because of the quality of the people in the embassy. Mansfield was the ambassador, Bill Sherman was the wonderful DCM, Al Seligmann was my prickly, but brilliant boss and I had a lot of respect for him. Then there were all the other good people in the political section. Tom Hubbard was the internal affairs guy. Bob Immerman was the labor attachï¿½ and his deputy was Chris LaFleur. Bill Breer was the political-military man. His deputy was Don Keyser, who typed letter-perfect telegrams at 75 words per minute on his IBM Selectric. I had working directly for me, as my external unit, Craig Drunkenly, Mark Minton and Mark Mohr. A great bunch of people.

Q: It was and that's a great list of names, but something you said earlier. There was a Japan crowd. You often say there's a Japan crowd, there's a China crowd, how did you crowd into these?

LAMBERTSON: The only senior job in the political section that allowed for that was the one that I had, the external affairs portfolio. Nick Platt had had it before.

Q: So, it was non-language designated?

LAMBERTSON: It was non-language designated. We were working with these superb English speakers in the Gaimusho. I managed to get to Japan that way. Yes, most of the members of the political section were new or in some cases old members of the "Japan club." They had done two years of language and some were on their second tour. They intended to spend much of their careers working on Japan and on U.S.-Japan relations. It was a high quality group. It was a specialty that attracted real talent and I am sure still does.

Q: You mentioned that your portfolio was the external issues, so, Japan's relationship with the outside world. The Carter administration comes in and says it wants to reduce troops in Korea. Korea is in Japan's backyard.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, that troubled the Japanese needless to say. We always tried to put the best possible interpretation on what Washington was saying and doing on that issue. They were bothered by it.

Q: Obviously it was raised in the diet, Gaimusho would be saying it was out there. They're getting reports from their own embassy.

LAMBERTSON: Yes. The Carter approach to Korea was a matter of concern to the Japanese. A lot of things happened in Korea during the time I was in Japan. There was the assassination of Park Chung Hee and all that followed, eventually the Kwangju massacre, which happened while I was still in Japan in the spring of '80. Bill Gleysteen, the ambassador in Korea, came to Tokyo a couple of times at least while I was there, once shortly after the assassination of Park and the assumption of control by Chun Doo Hwan, basically to brief the Japanese. They had their own embassy in Korea obviously, but they very much welcomed Bill's insights into what was going on. I went with Bill to all of his meetings and it was fascinating. I was extremely impressed with Bill Gleysteen, always had been. I had not had much contact with him before, but he was so articulate and so thoughtful and so clear in his explanations that I couldn't help but be greatly impressed. So, I'm sure, were the Japanese.

Q: How high did he brief?

LAMBERTSON: I suppose at least up to the vice minister of the Gaimusho. Then he had a couple of dinners with senior people who were very anxious to hear what he had to say. Bill asked me to be his political counselor before I left Japan. I was pretty tempted. I relied in part on Bill Sherman's advice as to what I ought to do next. He thought it would be good for me to go off to the RCDS, so I did that.

Q: We're illustrating how issues in third countries impact on our bilateral relationship and how the bilateral relationship responds to that. Isn't this the same period as Afghanistan?

LAMBERTSON: Yes. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and our response to that, which meant keeping as much political pressure as we possibly could on the Soviets and that included of course generating a boycott of the 1980 Olympics, which was one of the issues that we dealt with in Japan. They reluctantly agreed to go along with us and they did not attend the 1980 Olympics.

The Iran hostage crisis was happening as well and the Japanese were helpful to us, as I recall. They had an embassy in Tehran which was a good listening post and they had a very well connected Iranian ambassador in Tokyo who had been a confidant of the Ayatollah Khomeini. There was something of a channel of information there.

Just about anything significant that happened internationally during that period was somehow on our agenda. If you're in any embassy you're going to get instructions relating to things that happen half a world away, but that occurred more often in Japan than in most other places, and there were probably more often action requests connected to such messages, because we wanted Japanese support, expected it in a lot of these situations. The Japanese were not always totally anxious to give it, but they usually came through.

In a larger sense, we were always talking with the Japanese about their role in the world. We encouraged Japanese activism in foreign policy, because we knew that if they exerted their influence, it would bolster ours. We were of course aware of the political constraints under which the GOand Gaimusho professionallabored. The Gaimusho was almost always "out in front" of the rest of the government, the Diet and the public at large when it came to the idea of Japan being more activist internationally. Even today, the Japanese are mulling over what their role should be, and activism is still considered controversial. When I was working there, almost 30 years ago now, the constraintpolitical and even constitutionawere much stronger.

Q: That's of course exactly to the point and exactly why you need the Foreign Service. The other country is not at your beck and call. You make your case and he filters it through his interests, but I suspect it's a very close relationship in which you probably talked of Africa and Asia. You were talking about Russians seeking political asylum during the time that you were there?

LAMBERTSON: We had several incidents of people seeking political asylum from Russia, from the Soviet Union. I can't remember how many members of the Leningrad Symphony ended up under our care during my time there.

Q: You mean in the embassy?

LAMBERTSON: They sought political asylum and we provided it. But we had one bona fide defector case - a Soviet KGB colonel. It was an important defection. My involvement in that, apart from being up much of the night, was to inform the GOJ, which I did in a very early-morning meeting in the Gaimusho, and to ask for their cooperation in getting the fellow out of the country.

Q: President Carter visits Tokyo for the economic summit or was it something other than that?

LAMBERTSON: It was for the 1979 Economic Summit. The first of those things to be held in Japan. I guess it was the G-7 in those days. It was I'm sure a typical presidential visit. All the other presidents and prime ministers and their entourages were comfortably housed in the New Otani, a huge high rise hotel near the Akasaka Detached Palace where the meetings were to be held. We of course needed something much more than that and so we decided on the Okura Hotel, which was at the time the best hotel in the city and right across from our embassy. We made do with 600 rooms thertwo-thirds of the hotel's capacity. So, we had a few members of the cabinet as well as the president and all that that entails. Bill Sherman, the DCM, was the control officer and I was his assistant. I spent a lot of time with the pre-advance team of a dozen or so individuals. Lots more with the advance team, 60 or so. Then all my waking hours as the visit drew near. Have you been in a presidential visit?

Q: Yes, I have. That's a point I think to emphasize here. Tokyo is a large embassy. You've got a lot of people. We've got one in Bangkok, but these visits are actually major, require major allocations of officer time and effort. I mean you have, but you're allocating assigning officers to individual cars to see that the darn things work and they've got gas and nothing can go wrong, so everything has to be done in great detail which means the embassy stops, right?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, certainly anything of low priority quickly gets wiped off the agenda and the visit takes absolute top priority over everything else. Individual officers have to be assigned to each venue, there are officers assigned to motorcades for example, all of those things have to be done. This was a state visit for the president in addition to his participation in the Economic Summit, so there was some travel involved, some events that took place outside of Tokyo. Immense logistical preparation was of course required for all of that. Tremendous demands were made of the Japanese government, and more than once we came up against the inherent rigidities of the Japanese decision-making system. The Japanese would want everything thoroughly orchestrated well in advance and it was always very difficult to change plans at the last moment. Anything not conforming to the graven-in-stone plan was very hard to get approval for from the Japanese. We ran into that during the Carter visit.

Occasionally we simply ran roughshod over the Japanese, as we do routinely with presidential visits wherever they may be. We do things that are embarrassing to the embassy, that require the embassy to go around and mend fences afterwards. I think this is always part of a presidential visit. The role of the embassy is to make it work for the president, and to the extent possible limit the bruises among local officials. It always is an important political event for the host country and in that sense, generally speaking, a major "success," but there always also are abraded feelings among people on their side, in this case the Japanese side, whose sensibilities have been trampled upon by advance teams or some other part of the visit machinery.

Q: Let's look at that point for a minute because I've found that advance teams representing the president really don't care what country they're in or what society they're in.

LAMBERTSON: It could be Pittsburgh.

Q: There's an incredible lack of sensitivity and in one sense any lack of what the economy can provide for them. Advance people are the first ones the embassy wants to strangle before they get to the real delegation. How did you find advance people? I mean the security guys are tough enough.

LAMBERTSON: I thought that Carter's advance people were quite good. The team had a very young chief. I think he was in his late '20s. He was running a very big operation. He was a professional advance man. I respected his abilities. We got along pretty well. I got a very nice letter out of it at the end of the trip - one of the nicest of those things I ever received. Yes, you're quite right, they are fixated on doing exactly what they believe the president wants or what they believe is best for the president. It makes absolutely no difference whether that fits or does not fit with realities in the host country. So, you're bound to have conflicts and you just have to kind of try to massage the hurt feelings of your host country counterparts after wheels-up.

Q: You mentioned off line that when Carter came he wanted to do some jogging or something there.

LAMBERTSON: That's right, he was a jogger and he was staying in the ambassador's residence right across from the Okura Hotel. He had tried jogging in the small backyard of the residence once and he didn't like it. By then he had been to the Akasaka Palace for the first meeting of the Economic Summit and its grounds were very spacious, beautiful, 50 or 60 acres, and he thought, why can't I jog there? So, we informed the Japanese that the following morning the president would like to go jogging at the Akasaka Palace and the Japanese immediately said, that's not possible. We had a meeting that night in the Okura Hotel between the Japanese police, who were the ones who had vetoed the idea, and ourselves, ourselves being myself and Chuck Kartman who was my number one assistant as well as my motorcade man, and we tried to get the Japanese to let the president go jogging in the Akasaka Palace grounds the following morning. The Japanese police were absolutely adamant. There were two Gaimusho fellows there trying to be intermediaries between us and the Japanese police. That was the only time I ever saw a Japanese official cry.

The Japanese police were everywhere during that visit and the city was completely shut down. It was a very bizarre scene. Jimmy Carter could have jogged down the middle of the Ginza quite safely I'm sure, but the Japanese police would not let him use the palace grounds.

Q: You were saying that, as we all often experience, there is a point past which you have to make apologies for how a couple of things came down. I think in this visit you were saying...

LAMBERTSON: Yes, in this visit the president of course called on the emperor in the palace, and the audience with the emperor was obviously limited in numbers. The president and a few of his top people. One of the people who made the cut for that event was Dick Holbrooke. Incidentally I remember when the advance team came to Tokyo and we were talking about some event and went down a list of people and the advance man said, "Who's Dick Holbrooke?" Another member of the advance team said, "Oh, he's one of Vance's guys." It put a different perspective on who was a big shot and who was not within our system. In any event, for the call on the emperor, Dick Holbrooke was one of the participants, and the dozen or so people who were allowed into the reception room proceeded toward it. Apparently Dick Holbrooke had with him Nick Platt who was the country director, the fellow who I had replaced and who had in turn replaced Bill Sherman as Country Director, and Dick said, "Come on Nick, you can join in." So, Nick did and they marched in numbering 13 instead of 12, past the outstretched white-gloved hands of the imperial household staff. The Imperial Household Agency was outraged, and within two hours of the departure of Carter, Bill Sherman was called over to the palace. I went with him and we were reprimanded by the Imperial Household Agency's chief of protocol for this incredible breach of custom. We thought our people should have known better. Dick Holbrooke should have known better and Nick Platt, the country director, should certainly have known better. Anyway, the world didn't come to an end.

Q: The point is having a presidential visit in Japan, which is a major ally, and when you're dealing with the emperor whose status is so incredible. I mean Japanese language alone, you can't even talk to the gentleman, the vocabulary requirements are so extensive, so I mean this isn't just a visit down the street or to Ottawa. It has layers upon layers of protocol and meaning and you survived.

LAMBERTSON: That's right.

Q: You come out of Tokyo to get a promotion and a superior honor award for your efforts and you go to USUN for a short period of time. Is that because the ongoing training was set up the way it was, in terms of timing?

LAMBERTSON: Right. I left Japan in the summer of 1980 and I was by then assigned to the Royal College of Defence Studies (RCDS) in London, which began in January of 1981. So, I had nothing to do for the remainder of 1980. I was technically, by then, assigned to the European bureau because of where the RCDS is located. I was assigned by the European bureau to be their man at USUN for the General Assembly session of 1980, because that way they could fulfill their obligation to USUN without really having to dig into their own people. It was very handy for the bureau.

I spent September through December in New York and enjoyed it very much. I had very little work to do. There was not much of consequence that involved Europe as far as I could tell. All the action was Middle Eastern, relating to the Iran-Iraq War, which had just broken out. We were tilting toward Iraq. April Glaspie was the USUN Mid-East expert and I was impressed with her. She really seemed to know what she was talking about. Dirk Gleysteen, Bill's brother, was the political counselor.

As I mentioned to you, another interesting part of those three months was living at the Dakota, which I did. I lucked into a sublease well within my housing allowance. I was there the night John Lennon was shot and that was a strange and other-worldly kind of experience. I didn't witness the shooting, but I lived with the rather surreal aftermath for a number of days. I enjoyed living in New York.

Q: I think the thing to note here is that when the UN General Assembly meets in the fall, there's a surge, the Department adds more officers to the USUN, because all the speakerthe prime and foreign ministermake speeches and meet with the Secretary of State.

LAMBERTSON: Right. Yes, there are going to be a lot of bilaterals. There's an annual infusion of world leaders into New York and it takes more than the USUN Mission itself to handle that. They need help.

Q: It's a considerable dance in scheduling the Secretary of State. He's to meet with this minister and that minister. That's why there's this surge, so that you just lucked into an annual process.

LAMBERTSON: That's right and it's one that is good experience. I was much more deeply involved, though, later on as a DAS. I think if in your normal course of Foreign Service assignments, you don't have any exposure to the UN or multilateral diplomacy, a General Assembly session in New York wouldn't hurt you at all. I would recommend it.

Q: The senior training that you're talking about the Royal College of Defence Studies, would that be the same thing as going to the Army War College at Carlisle?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, basically it is. It is something that comes up and it was an option that I had and it's the one that I wanted. I had a Stanford possibility also, but I really liked the idea of going to London and I liked the idea of the RCDS. Again, this is one of those things that Bill Sherman advised me on; he thought the RCDS would be great fun and he was right.

Q: Had he gone through it himself?

LAMBERTSON: He had not, but he knew people who had. I don't know whether it is still part of the menu for senior training in the State Department. I think it's a rather expensive year for the Department. I'm not sure what the tuition fee is, but there is one for Americans and for anybody from a developed country. Then the living expenses are not inconsiderable in London. Anyway, it was a wonderful year. The RCDS was formerly called the Imperial Defence College, until that became politically incorrect. It's been around a long time.

Q: Is that where John Keegan teaches?

LAMBERTSON: No, they don't have a teaching staff. They have a small administrative staff and that's all.

Q: Oh, okay.

LAMBERTSON: Every year they have 76 students, because that's the number of chairs that comfortably fit in the lecture hall. It's an old mansion in Belgravia. Belgrave Square in fact. We would be expected to be there by around 10:00 in the morning, but that would be only for coffee or tea and it was kind of like a gentlemen's club with big overstuffed chairs and racks of newspapers. That's the way the day began. I think maybe around 10:30 or so there would be a lecture, until noon. Sometimes a lecture in the afternoon, sometimes small group meetings of one kind or another in the afternoon, sometimes nothing in the afternoon. It was not a back-breaking schedule, but the people were great.

The Australians had two or three very good people there who I got to know well, and that was useful for me later on. The British had many outstanding people. The composition of the class was roughly two-thirds British and one-third the rest of the world and I would say two-thirds military and about one-third civilian.

Ranks were a little bit higher than at war colleges in the United States. There were a lot of brigadiers and even some two star generals from foreign places. A number of people who succeeded brilliantly in their respective services in years to come. So, I enjoyed it very much. I'm very comfortable around the military. I always have been. The quality of the lecturers was almost without exception quite high. One of the best was General Bernard Rogers, NATO Commander and fellow Fairview man.

There was a great travel program. We broke up into small groups for orientation visits around the UK early in the spring. I went with a group of about ten people to Wales. Then in July the college closed down for a month. Sacie and I did bicycle trips in Ireland and France. In the fall we had a large group trip to NATO and to the British Army on the Rhine and then again a small group trip, in my case to the Middle East where I'd never been before and knew I probably would never go again. That's the one I wanted and got. We met Anwar Sadat, a couple of weeks before he was killea highly charismatic man.

Q: That's introductions to things that are going to expand you either by virtue of your personal contacts or the material.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, I thought it was all quite relevant to a Foreign Service Officer who was going to have a few more years of service. It broadened my perspective. I'd been working primarily, almost exclusively, on East Asian issues since joining the Foreign Service, and it was interesting and refreshing to be in a European venue and to hear a lot about NATO, and U.S.-NATO issues. I liked that very much.

Q: You finished RCDS by writing a memorable paper?

LAMBERTSON: No, not memorable, but I was quite proud of it. It was done with no footnotes and very little research but it read well and it was chosen for publication in the annual journal of the college, along with about eight or nine others. A triumph of sorts. "Sustaining the Alliance: The Future of Transatlantic Political Cooperation." Good bed-time reading.

Q: Now you had arranged this year of sort of decompression and exposure to new issues in advance. How did the opportunity to come back to Washington arise?

LAMBERTSON: I obviously began thinking about that not long after arriving in London. It was fairly early in the year that Mike Armacost called me and asked me if I would be interested in being the Korea Country Director. Mike was DAS at that time, with Japan and Korea and some other things in his portfolio, and he was the senior DAS. Mike was there under Dick Holbrooke, and this was now the Reagan administration. Holbrooke had left and Mike I guess was still there, although he didn't remain there very long. I said that I'd be delighted. So I knew fairly early on in the calendar year of 1981 that I'd be going to EAP/K.

Q: In fact when you finish up in London, you...

LAMBERTSON: So, when I finished in London I went back to Washington by way of Seoul. I met Dixie Walker, the ambassador. I think it was Dixie who really wanted me to do thato meet him before I started in at EAP/K. Paul Cleveland was the Deputy Chief of Mission there. Do you know Dixie?

Q: Not very well, no.

LAMBERTSON: He was basically a China specialist, not an uncontroversial one. A good man and a pretty good ambassador. He had his foibles, but basically he did a good job for the United States. Anyway, I stopped and met him, stayed at the residence, and then came on home to Washington by way of Kansas.

Q: Actually, Dixie Walker was there when you went through, oh, he would be there the entire time that you were there?

LAMBERTSON: The entire time that I was on the desk. Yes. He stayed five years in Korea, managed to stretch it out a long time.

Q: You were saying, he was a unique personality. Some people said that there were areas where he was quite...

LAMBERTSON: Well, he had his blind spots. But he knew Korea well and he had good insights into Asian culture in general. One kind of funny thing I remember, shortly after I'd joined EAP/K, I went out to Seoul as country director for one of those security consultative meetings, the big annual...

Q: The SCM...

LAMBERTSON: Yes, the big annual get togethers that we had that alternated between Seoul and Washington. I went out on the airplane with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General David Jones. I remember he actually piloted the plane on takeoff from Andrews with his staff kind of keeping their fingers crossed hoping he still knew how to do it.

In any event we got to Korea. Weinberger was there and Rich Armitage was with Weinberger. The first thing on the agenda was a briefing at the residence by Dixie Walker. We went there and sat in his living room and Dixie and his staff briefed us, but basically it was Dixie who did the talking, and he went into much more detail than anybody needed to have. Weinberger was falling asleep in his chair. Anyway, it eventually ended and later Rich Armitage kind of zinged me for letting my ambassador go on so long. I was in the position of defending one political appointee to another political appointee.

Q: Now this is March of 1982 with Weinberger; you were saying that General Powell was also on that trip.

LAMBERTSON: No, that was a different trip.

Q: Oh, was it? Okay.

LAMBERTSON: In the fall of '83 there were three events that dominated my working life. The first was the shoot-down of KAL-007, which was a traumatic thing for Korea, with a Korean airliner shot out of the sky. For the Korea desk it meant a lot of additional work. Primarily it was the Soviet desk that was dealing with our reaction to it, dealing with Moscow on the issue. But there was much more to do - everything from organizing a memorial service at the National Cathedral to unending meetings, keeping the Koreans informed, writing papers. Then about the time we got all that cleaned up I was down in North Carolina on a much needed vacation and Spence Richardson, my deputy, called me around midnight and said, "There has been a bombing in Rangoon and half the South Korean cabinet has been killed." I went back up to Washington. That was indeed what happened, a North Korean plot designed to kill Chun Doo Hwan. The bomb missed him, but it killed six or eight really good people including the wonderful foreign minister and a young economic advisor named Kim Jae Ik who would have been hugely important in Korea if he'd lived.

Weinberger was our representative at the funeral for those people and that's when I went to Korea on Weinberger's airplane. Colin Powell was on board, Weinberger's military assistant, and we made the round trip in 56 hours. If Dixie briefed us, I think he was wise enough not to stretch it out.

Q: Or there would have been a 58th hour.

LAMBERTSON: Right. That was when I first met Colin Powell. As I mentioned to you I was struck by the traveling style of Weinberger versus George Schultz. I had been on George Schultz's airplane by then at least once.

Q: Under what circumstance?

LAMBERTSON: Going from Seoul to Beijing earlier in '83. I went because there was a possibility of a Korea subject being raised with the Chinese. I got to stay at the Diaoyutai guesthouse and do one of those Great Hall of the People banquets. Shultz's airplane was incredibly crowded. I contrasted that with this later trip with Weinberger. It was basically a 707 cargo plane with one of those pods put in it. There were very few people aboard. It was very bare bones - and I was favorably impressed. Why can't everybody travel like that?

Q: Without a large entourage.

LAMBERTSON: Yes.

Q: You were saying that Powell even handed out sleeping pills.

LAMBERTSON: Right. That was one of his jobs. He also cued up the tape recorder to play Willie Nelson's On the Road Again when we took off.

Q: One of the, as the director of the Korea desk, now when you're first starting in January of '82, what are you seeing as some of the major issues that you're going to be working with?

LAMBERTSON: A major issue in a sense all through that period, even though sometimes it was obscured by other more immediate problems, was the political situation in South Korea and the U.S. position vis-ï¿½-vis that situation. In other words, the nature of Chun Doo Hwan's military regime, human rights questions, democratization and to what extent could and should the United States pressure the Korean government to do better. That was always an issue on our bilateral agenda with the Koreans whenever we had high level visitors going there. It was always something of an issue for the desk and we would have congressional critics and others around town focusing on that issue. We had to respond to them.

Q: In one sense wasn't that issue highlighted by the Kwangju circumstance, that had happened in 1980 and prior to this and that became the poster child for these issues?

LAMBERTSON: That was certainly a key event in modern Korean history and in U.S.-Korea relations. Human rights issues loomed large. Shortly after I took over the desk, Kim Dae Jung came to the United States for a period of exile, having been let out of jail just a few weeks or months previously. Probably having been saved from execution by a promise to invite Chun Doo Hwan to visit the United States early in the new Reagan Administration - do not kill Kim Dae Jung. This I understand was the bargain that Dick Holbrooke and Mike Armacost had worked out.

In any event Kim Dae Jung came to the United States and spent a good deal of time, mostly in Boston. When he came to Washington I had breakfast with him and I am quite sure that I was the only State Department official to see him. That was wrong, a mistake; my mistake. He should have been received at a much higher level because he was an important man. If you know Kim Dae Jung's history, we perhaps saved his life in 1980, and certainly did so a number of years earlier when Phil Habib was the ambassador and Don Gregg was the station chief. Kim Dae Jung had been abducted from a Tokyo hotel and was aboard a Korean fishing boat about to be tossed overboard when we intervened. Those issues were ever present I would say.

At the end of 1983 there was a Reagan visit to Seoul, which some human rights advocates in the United States said was inappropriate, but I thought it was very good. It was good in the context of the rough autumn they had had, with KAL-007 followed by the assassinations and bombing in Rangoon. The Reagan visit helped to end the year on a positive note. I wasn't as involved in the planning for that visit because I was in Washington. Paul Cleveland, the DCM, was of course deeply involved. I went out a couple of days before the visit, and I was quite impressed with the way that advance team worked and the rather smooth way in which it all went. The desk had a role in the visit, of courslots of papers were producebut the embassy was much more deeply engaged.

Q: That trip probably wasn't just to Korea. It probably included...

LAMBERTSON: It had been a Japan-Korea trip.

Q: Yes. Looking at a presidential visit from the Washington side is different from the receiving side?

LAMBERTSON: It's much more relaxing as I recall. Much easier. I was there for it, but mostly as a spectator. I remember sitting in on the last meeting of the advance team as they went through their final checks. I remember the advance man saying to his people that the next day President Reagan would be in a motorcade before the largest crowd of his Presidency, which I guess it was.

Q: By this time there wasn't any more movement on withdrawing troops from Korea? It had all blown over.

LAMBERTSON: No. That's right. Talk of withdrawing troops had died away.

Q: On the political evolution side, here you have this authoritarian structure. Were there any besides Kim, were there any other allies internal to the Korean system that were voicing more modernistic approaches? I mean its one thing, it seems to me, to tell an authoritarian regime it can't keep shooting people and another thing to actually talk about the political maturation process where other actors are beginning to develop.

LAMBERTSON: That was certainly beginning to happen in South Korea. There were other actors, including very seasoned politicians, not just Kim Dae Jung who was still in the United States, but Kim Young Sam, and there were degrees of modernity among the military. Not everybody was a cave dweller, politically. I think Noh Tae Woo himself is a good example. He succeeded Chun Doo Hwan as president, but he was a very different kind of general. He really was the first in the democratic, so to speak, line of succession. There were differences within the ruling elite. Some who were more liberal than others. Chun Doo Hwan himself in the end made the right decision. He essentially agreed to allow a peaceful transition at the end of his term instead of sending troops out to confront the demonstrators. That happened a couple of months after I left Korea in 1987. At that time, in 1983, there were still a few more years of Chun Doo Hwan ahead.

Q: Right. As you were saying there was a kind of a long-term thing that would pop up from time to time. One of the issues that would pop up fairly importantly was the rice issue.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, indeed. I still think it was the single hardest problem I ever dealt with in the Foreign Servicmaybe because it was as much a domestic issue as a foreign policy issue. In a nutshell, in 1980 the South Koreans had a rice shortage. They had to buy rice somewhere. The United States didn't have a surplus that year, oddly enough, so we agreed that they, the Koreans could buy the rice they needed from Japan. Ordinarily Japanese rice, by agreement, was kept off the international market because it is so lavishly subsidized. We allowed that sale on the condition that the Koreans would agree to buy 500,000 tons of the 1981 crop of California rice, which is their preferred variety.

They agreed to that condition and by so agreeing were committed. That commitment having been made, a particular rice broker, Grover Connell of New Jersey, who had long represented the major California rice co-ops, basically got their agreement that he would be the broker and he would sell the rice for them. The Koreans, however, refused to deal with him because they had dealt with him in the past and disliked him intensely. You know, Korean rice issues go way back. If you remember Tong Sun Park, or people like Otto Passman. It's a rich and colorful history. In any event the Koreans said no, we're not going to deal with Grover Connell. Grover Connell, however, had control of the rice, so there was an impasse. The congressional rice lobby was unleashed and that's when the heat began to build on EAP/K and myself. There were calls from congressmen. There were letters to the president, letters to the Secretary of State about these nefarious Koreans who were refusing to follow through on a commitment that they had made. There were other, more insidious pressures including a visit to my office that I didn't know about until after the fact by a prominent West Coast politician and big man in the rice lobby, who basically threatened the career of one of my officers. We were perceived as supporting the Koreans. We, the State Department, and I think the East Asia bureau in particular. This had all happened with very little reference to the 7th floor, and for a long time, for months, the highest-ranking guy in the Department dealing with it was Tony Albrecht. Did you ever know Tony Albrecht?

Q: No.

LAMBERTSON: A wonderful fellow and fine officer. He was the DAS for economic affairs. I think his career was more European-focused for the most part, but he was in this job in EAP. He was tough and principled, and he was completely unafraid of anything. Basically we just kind of kept shielding ourselves as slings and arrows from the Hill headed our way. We did attempt to convince the Koreans to go ahead and go through with the purchase but they were absolutely adamant. They were not going to deal with Grover Connell. They were being stubborn, as Koreans can be.

Ken Dam eventually got involved. He was the Deputy Secretary of State at that time. I came to wish he hadn't because he seemed to me to be overly responsive to congressional pressure and basically tended to transmit that pressure to the Korean government, which I believed to be unproductive and maybe counterproductive. But then he got back out of the issue.

Paul Wolfowitz was the Assistant Secretary at the time and he had not been involved and we got him involved finally. I think the precipitating event was a hearing called by the rice lobby, by Congressman Bill Alexander of Arkansas, and Paul was going to testify for the bureau along with the Undersecretary of Agriculture, Dick Lina very savvy guy. We all went up there to the committee room and they made their prepared statements and when all that was done, klieg lights came on and Bill Alexander announced that he would now "swear" the witnesses, and there would be sworn testimony from then on and it would be televised. It was going to be a kind of congressional shooting gallery. Wolfowitz and the Undersecretary basically stood up at that point and said, no, we're not going to do that, those weren't the ground rules. We were prepared for a hearing, not an investigation, and we went home. I liked Wolfowitz's performance that day. He was tough and knew what he was doing. The Agriculture man also was very good.

In any event we were at this impasse and there was very intense congressional pressure, which was the reason it was a very hard problem for me as a desk director. We were saved by nature, because the issue went on so long that the 1982 crop was harvested and began to pour into the bins of California. You can't tell 1981 rice from 1982 rice when it's in the bin. In that sense it's a fungible commodity like water or milk, it flows together. And about that time the co-ops themselves realized they'd been shooting themselves in the foot for Grover Connell of New Jersey for a year. The co-ops broke free of Grover Connell, the Koreans readily bought 500,000 tons of unidentified vintage rice and the problem went away.

This experience was very interesting because it was an illustration to me of the way those kinds of lobbies could work. The rice lobby has always been one of the more tightly knit and effective ones on the Hill, I think, and it includes members from California as well as from the South.

Q: That's an interesting demonstration of the interaction of the role congress plays in these games. Here you were in Tokyo and you had to deal with the Japanese response to Korean issues. Here you're on the desk and you're as much concerned with the congress as the Koreans.

LAMBERTSON: Absolutely.

Q: This is tape four. You were talking about political-military issues in Korea.

LAMBERTSON: I don't recall any particularly outstanding ones during the years 1982 to 1984 quite frankly. It was always an active part of the desk's portfolio, but I don't think we had any major crises. We had a defection across the demilitarized zone, I remember that. A young army private from St. Louis decided to try life in the People's Paradise. That was a strange happening. We had regular military exercisehuge in scale. The North Koreans of course regularly protested. There were always real estate issues of one kind or another to talk about with the Koreans, but I think nothing of great consequence because the troop withdrawal issue had pretty much been put to bed and would not come up again for a number of more years.

Q: One of the things that I have on the list here that I've come up with is fishery issues..

LAMBERTSON: Something about tuna fishing. The San Diego fleet?

Q: Yes.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, I do recall a conflict there, but I don't remember the details. That, too is an industry group that can muster a good deal of clout. I think John Negroponte by then was Assistant Secretary for Fisheries, or Oceanic Affairs, and he had done a good deal of negotiating on those issues. I remember him somehow being involved in a Korea-related problem, but I can't think of the details.

Q: It's illustrative of the fact that you never can tell what's going to come up bilaterally and that you have to make some adjustment to it. I mean you often find people who don't see foreign relations as managing small things so they don't become big things. That's why I had it on my list. For example, one other thing that was major at that time on the commercial side, was Control Data. It was having some problems in Korea at that time. The company got kicked out or their license was suspended or something and the desk got involved.

LAMBERTSON: I also remember there were labor issues. Korean labor was very much constrained in those years, but nevertheless labor issues would arise and occasionally they involved an American company. It seems to me there were instances where American plant managers were briefly held hostage, for example. Control Data may have been one of those.

Q: Did we talk about who was on the desk with you at this time?

LAMBERTSON: My deputy when I started out was Bill Breer who I worked with in Japan, and then he moved on and was replaced by Spence Richardson, who I had known since Saigon. The first economic officer was Bob Richmond and he was succeeded by John Hoog. There was a North Korea watcher - now it's a whole section of that desk. I believe just about the whole time I was there Barbara Harvey had that job, a very good officer. We had a junior officer. At least part of the time it was David Straub, who is the country director now and I think the best Korean speaker in the Foreign Service. (Spence Richardson and John Hoog are now my colleagues in KEDO, in North Korea.)

Q: Your view of the world of course is Korea centric, but during this time a lot was being done on China issues. Did any of that impact on you?

LAMBERTSON: I don't recall them impacting upon me, but I remember thinking that Bill Rope was doing a hell of a good job on the China desk under a lot of pressure from a lot of different quarters. This was what, the time of the second Shanghai communiquï¿½?

Q: Yes, '82 August yes.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, and it seemed very complicated and very intense and it just seemed to me that that desk was performing very well. As I know it had under Chas Freeman. When was Chas the country director?

Q: He was there '79 to '81.

LAMBERTSON: Yes. Didn't Chas initiate the practice of official-informal weekly summaries?

Q: I wouldn't be surprised.

LAMBERTSON: Then all desks started doing them. Something out to the embassy each week just to give a status report on where various issues stood, and that was a new innovation. In any event, I admired Rope and I always thought he should have been better rewarded.

Q: While you were on the Korea desk in March of '84 you did some consultation travel to Sydney and Canberra on the ANZUS Talks.

LAMBERTSON: Right. I knew that I would be going out that summer to be the DCM in Australia, so this was an opportunity to see New Zealand and Australia for the first time and see Canberra and see what I'd gotten myself into. It was a good trip. I think those were perhaps the last of the ANZUS Talks because New Zealand and the Labor Government were already having problems with our port calls, our "neither confirm nor deny" policy.

Q: You knew you were going to go there as DCM?

LAMBERTSON: Yes.

Q: How does one get chosen DCM? I mean this is a senior position in the Foreign Service. Country director is an incredible accomplishment, but DCM is a very important position in the whole system.

LAMBERTSON: As I recall Steve Lyne, the incumbent DCM suggested the idea to me at some point, maybe late '83 or very early '84. Steve had been in the political section with me in Saigon. He was our man among the Montagnards.

Q: The Saigon mafia?

LAMBERTSON: Yes. I guess it was kind of a Saigon mafia connection. He said it was an interesting place to live and work and I ought to give it a try. He recommended me to the Ambassador, Bob Nesen. I guess I had no other immediate alternatives. I was fairly sure, however, when I went off to Australia that when Paul Cleveland left Seoul, Dixie was probably going to want me to come to Seoul. I went to Australia knowing or at least assuming that it probably wasn't going to last all that long. It turned out to be a highly interesting and enjoyable experience. We do have a special relationship with the Australians. They are good political and security partners, and we have an uninhibited intelligence relationship.

I remember at one point when I was there Bob Gates, who was then DDI, came out to Australia to talk with the Australians about his take on the world basically. This would have been probably sometime in '84. Gorbachev was new on the scene and Gates told the Australians that he felt Gorbachev was fundamentally different from his predecessors and that there were going to be remarkable changes in the Soviet Union as a result. I was very impressed at the time, and even more so later, as those things indeed happened.

We didn't have any serious bilateral issues with our Australian friends, but there were often political controversies occasioned by our presence. There's a left-wing in Australia that's noisy if not necessarily powerful. They're certainly well represented in the media, so there is a lot of press criticism of the U.S. There's a certain strain of anti-Americanism on the left. There was always a little bit of tension, stuff that would get my blood going occasionally.

We had this remarkable technological phenomenon out there at Pine Gap that was important to us and extremely sensitive, and the Australians were very good about helping us with it and maintaining and providing political defense for it if we needed it. The Hawke government was rock solid. Bob Hawke himself was an appealing personality. I got to see him from time to time accompanying visitors.

The best part about that tour is that I was there 18 months and I was the Chargï¿½ for fully 12 months. Bob Nesen, the incumbent ambassador, was a political appointee. I got there in August of '84, and he left in the first half of '85. Then Bill Lane, another political appointee, arrived I believe in early '86.

Q: Yes, I've got that he presented his credentials on the 29th of April '89.

LAMBERTSON: No.

Q: That'd be too long. '86, that's '86. So, it would be May of '85 to April of '86 basically?

LAMBERTSON: And Nesen was often gone during the few months remaining in his tenure. He was involved with the '84 campaign. Nesen was a major contributor, and he loved horses and loved the Aussies. He was an extremely nice man, although he wasn't too much interested in the details of running an embassy.

Q: Under those conditions a lot falls to you, the DCM.

LAMBERTSON: Yes and I enjoyed that very much. Then Bill Lane was his successor and I...you say April of...?

Q: '86.

LAMBERTSON: Must have been March, or maybe even February. I left just days after that. Sacie and I went with him and his wife for his presentation of credentials to the Governor General in Sydney, at the summer residence under the Harbor Bridge. It was pretty clear that Bill Lane was a very different kind of political appointee ambassador, one who intended to be fully in charge of every detail. I handed off to my successor Dick Teare, my old Vietnamese language partner. So, we had three political section Saigon guys in a row. Steve Lyne, myself and Dick Teare as DCMs in Canberra.

Q: Into the DCMship business, my recollection is actually the State Department runs you through a course?

LAMBERTSON: That's right, there was a DCM course.

Q: How long is that? What does it cover?

LAMBERTSON: It was several days at some offsite location in West Virginia or Pennsylvania. I don't remember much about the content. There was a certain emphasis on the public affairs aspects of an embassy and the DCM's potential responsibility in that area and some discussion of broader management and dealing with your ambassador, those kinds of things. In fact I'd totally forgotten about the course until you mentioned it.

Q: I talked to a lot of people out of it at FSI and they were saying that that course was cranked up because the Department was finding something like 70% of the DCMs were being fired by the career and non-career ambassadors because they weren't getting along. The issue was you need to run your DCMs through some course of awareness training as to how to get along and how to handle yourself in these circumstances. I don't know when the course started, but...

LAMBERTSON: I once heard Marshall Green say that a good DCM is one who walks around with a smile on his ambassador's face.

Q: That's Marshall. Wasn't he ambassador in Australia at one point?

LAMBERTSON: He had been, yes, he was there in fact when I was in EA/RA. I have a nice letter from him in response to a paper I wrote on Soviet policy in East Asia, and Marshall Green very kindly responded. He said he thought it was good.

Q: Because I remember reading something by him that I'd like you to comment on. He was there at the time that the Labor Party came to power for the first time in 12 years or something like that. This was the Vietnam War period. Labor had been critical and he suddenly, this was an unanticipated victory on Labor's part, and he sort of realized that they hadn't been talking to Labor Party officials for a long time. He gets into the defense attachï¿½'s airplane and is flying around Australia trying to get to the Labor Party guys to get them to not say anything silly about Vietnam in the euphoria of their victory. Which brings another point, academics and pundits now talk about how great it is to have democracies around the world and it strikes me that the Foreign Service's job is complicated by the fact that there are democracies. I mean you're saying okay, there's an anti-American component to Australia, but you can't laugh that off, you have to deal with it. You have the public affairs officers there. You have to have somebody in the political section touching bases with those people so that you understand their viewpoints. Because the domestic politics of democracies have a new importance increasing the job of the Foreign Service, America's first line of defense overseas.

LAMBERTSON: Think how much more complicated in a way it is to conduct bilateral relations with South Korea today, now that it is a democracy.

Q: There you go.As you were saying here, you know, you're actually moving from the authoritarian Korea to the Aussie situation and we do have these facilities. We have this incredible military relationship. In fact it's incredibly deep. All the Anglo-Saxon nations have a special relationship and share things among themselves that they don't share with anybody else and yet you have the democracy aspect spinning in there and it's not easy even though they are our allies.

LAMBERTSON: Yes and in some respects it's more complicated.

Q: I would suspect even at that, this is not an easy as falling off a log thing to go through because you have to be very much aware of what the Australians are doing.

LAMBERTSON: No, it was not by any means a simple place to do business. It is, in its way, very complex, and therefore far more interesting than you might think. It's not dull being in Australia. Of course it's also a marvelous place to live.

Q: Oh, yes.

LAMBERTSON: Anyway, back to Marshall Green. I remember when Paul Cleveland was leaving the bureau to go to Seoul as political counselor shortly after I got back to the bureau in 1973, Marshall Green was the Assistant Secretary and Phil Habib was about to replace him. Green was presiding in the conference room over a party for Paul Cleveland and, you've probably heard both of these, but he had two offerings that day. One was "these are the times that try Seoul's men", followed by "let he who is without sin castigate the first ROK."

Q: That is so typical of Green. I remember I did a book review for the Foreign Service Journal on something Marshall had written and Ed Peck wrote a letter complaining that I didn't catch the full essence of Marshall's humor. Who else was down in Australia with you?

LAMBERTSON: We had a great Embassy team, and made some good friendships. Dick Baker was the political counselor, Bob Lavey the special assistant, Jim Waggoner the Defense Attachï¿½. Wes Stuart was the PAO. Duke Ryan was the CAO. It was a wonderful group of people. Australia's such a marvelous place for people who like outdoor activity as we do. We did a lot of camping and got ourselves a Toyota Land Cruiser, drove deep into the outback, and spent a lot of weekends on beaches, deserted beaches - just a wonderful place.

Q: Some argue Australians do so well in swimming in the last Olympics because they're trying to outrace the sharks.

LAMBERTSON: It's interesting. They've really had kind of a renaissance. Sport is important to Australians, always has been, but they've clearly succeeded marvelously in developing world class athletes in the last 20 years. They weren't as impressive when I was there. One of the nice things that happened - I'm a sports fan - when I was there was the World Cup Track championship, which is held midway between Olympics and it was held in Canberra and I was Chargï¿½. I invited the American team to a reception at the ambassador's residence. Craig Masback, who is the head of the U.S. Track and Field Federation today, was a young miler. He told me it was the first time - and he had been doing international competition for a number of years - it was the first time he'd ever been invited to a reception at an ambassador's residence. I invited coaches from other teams. The Soviet coach was for years the world record holder in the long jump until Bob Beaman broke it in Mexico City in 1968. I loved that.

It was a team competition. The United States versus the Soviet Union versus East Germany. Those were the three distinct national teams, versus the rest of Europe, the rest of the Americas, and Asia. Scoring was on that basis. It came down to a final event, the 1600 meter relay and we won and by winning we won the team competition over the Soviets. I was sitting next to the Soviet ambassador and the East German. It was a great experience. I met John Landy that day, who was the second sub four-minute miler in the world in 1954. I've been a track and field buff all my life and I was in track fans' heaven.

Q: That raises an interesting point though, how some of the social functions unfold in these countries. In Australia would you entertain at home or entertain at restaurants?

LAMBERTSON: I did one-on-one lunches a fair amount in restaurants, but we entertained a lot at home too. We had a house that was the smallest representational house you can imagina nice bungalow and a very attractive one that Sacie made even more attractive. We could have dinner for a dozen people without too much crowding. That was about the limit. We did quite a lot of entertaining at the house, as we did in Japan.

In Japan more often than not it was lunches. But we did stuff at our house in Tokyo frequently, thanks to Sacie's organizational abilities and the help of a Thai maid. I think that's less common now in the Foreign Service, isn't that right? I've heard that. There's less at-home entertaining - and therefore less necessity for representational housing in some places and in some positions.

Q: Maybe a cart and a horse thing because I know in Bangkok when we were first there in the '70s, there were such huge separate houses and now they package everybody in apartments.

LAMBERTSON: Life has changed and I've found, at least when I was in Bangkok, and I think in Seoul also, there wasn't much "at home" entertainment done of a representational nature. At least not below the counselor level.

Q: One of the major events with Australia is the annual AUSMIN (Australia-U.S. Ministerial) Was that going on at that time, or was that a function of the collapse of the ANZUS Treaty?

LAMBERTSON: No, I'm trying to think, we surely would have had one in the year and a half while I was there and I'm trying to think when it was.

Q: Generally a fall event, that's when I organized it anyway.

LAMBERTSON: I think it might have been while Nesen was there and I think maybe it was in Sydney.

Q: Because it's one of the major bilateral events, very high on the radar of the Australians because if they get lucky the American Secretary of States and the Secretary of Defense are involved in these meetings and its supposed to alternate between each capital.

LAMBERTSON: Then it might have been in Washington. Shultz came out, but it wasn't for an AusMin visit, it was purely SECSTATE.

Q: So, you had one SECSTATE visit out there?

LAMBERTSON: Yes.

Q: Yes, July '85.

LAMBERTSON: Do you have anything else on that time line that I've forgotten?

Q: I just noticed that you did have a Secretary of State come in July of '85.

LAMBERTSON: He wanted to go to Perth and I recommended against Perth because Perth in July is the worst place in Australia. It's cold and rainy. But he had been stationed there in World War II and by gosh he wanted to see it again. And it was cold and rainy.

Q: I remember writing a speech or seeing a speech he made in Tokyo one time and saying I'd been here before - August 1945.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, as a Marine. I believe he met his wife in the Philippines. She was a nurse.

Q: You had mentioned earlier that you thought if Paul left Seoul you'd be given a crack and apparently that's what happened.

LAMBERTSON: That's right. I don't recall exactly when that was finalized, but it was sometime during 1985. Paul was named ambassador to New Zealand, and incidentally he was notified of that in a very nice way that I don't think is done anymore. He got a phone call from the president. He was out on the Yongsan Golf Course for an early morning golf game with the USFK general and a couple of retired Korean generals and somebody came out from the club house and said he had a telephone call. He went in and took it and came back out and told his fellow players that that had been the president. That was Reagan. I think maybe the practice ended with Reagan. Maybe it only took place during the Reagan administration - a very nice personal gesture.

Q: This was the start of the second Reagan Administration.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, or at least early-on. So, in 1986, March, or possibly earlier, maybe February, Bill Lane presented his credentials and I left just after that.

Q: Direct transfer to Seoul.

LAMBERTSON: Direct transfer to Seoul.

Q: What does a direct transfer mean? You've got a household, a family.

LAMBERTSON: Well, it really was quite direct for me. Sacie came back to the United States and spent a little time here. No, we both came back to the United States, but it was very brief for me. A little bit longer stay for her. Our shipment got there in a timely fashion. It wasn't long before we were reestablished in that nice old Japanese house that has now been torn down, which was the DCM residence. As usual, Sacie did great things with it.

That compound is one we hope is going to be the site of a new American Embassy, a deal that we thought we had finalized when I was the DCM there and it is still controversial, and unconsummated. In any event it was a nice house and that too was a good tour. It was so brief - blindingly short. But it was interesting.

Q: Well, Dixie Walker's still there. He was there for a few more months.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, Dixie Walker was there. Right.

Q: Again, we keep coming back to the point that here you're sitting in one country, but something that happened someplace else reverberates. At the time that you're in Seoul, DCM, Marcos falls in the Philippines. Did that particularly reverberate, because there's still this authoritarian system in place in Korea and it's going to be feeling...

LAMBERTSON: I think Marcos fell just before I went from Australia to Korea, didn't he?

Q: Actually it's about the same month.

LAMBERTSON: About the same time. Yes, it was a source of great interest and hope and fear, depending upon who you were in Korea, that that transition had taken place, and I'm sure the American role in it was noted by Chun Doo Hwan and his people. With every passing month Chun Doo Hwan was that much closer to the end of his "legitimate" presidential term, so something dramatic was going to happen in the summer of '87. Either he was going to step down as required or he was not. I'm sure that the Marcos resignation had a considerable impact.

Q: Just before I came out here I was reading Secretary Shultz's book and he made a trip out to Korea shortly after your arrival? He says that at that time there were the largest anti-government riots going on. I'm not quite sure of his time line.

LAMBERTSON: I think he came in the spring of '87, shortly before I left. It was '87 when things began to heat up and people began to anticipate a transition or some sort of dramatic change; tensions began to rise in the spring of '87. I believe that's when Shultz made his trip. There were demonstrations very often; they customarily were at major intersections a few blocks from the embassy, and near where I lived. The smell of tear gas was often in the air.

Q: A modernizing perfume? Now, you're Dixie Walker's DCM.

LAMBERTSON: By early '87 I believe Lilley had arrived.

Q: What was Dixie like for those last few months? I mean he's been there now for some time. He's very comfortable. He's met everybody there is to meet.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, and I think the embassy was working pretty well. I don't recall any huge management issues that had been neglected. Paul Cleveland had been a good DCM and knew how to work with Dixie, and I kind of stepped into, in a sense, a well grooved track, that is as the manager of the embassy. I don't ever remember getting crosswise with Dixie or there really being a need for me to. It seemed to me to be kind of an easy transition.

Q: Did you also slide behind Paul in his golf game?

LAMBERTSON: No, I don't play golf. In fact, well, that same group...

Q: That's a bit of a handicap.

LAMBERTSON: ...that same group pressed me to join. It was called the Tuesday morning golf group and it met on Thursdays, the year round, at 6:30 in the morning. I finally told them that after the New Year I would join them. This would have been January of '87. I went out there and the course was entirely covered in a sheet of ice that was rutted in places because there had been snow that had melted and refrozen. We played our round. You'd hit the golf ball and it might hit a rut and bounce off hundreds of feet in the other direction skittering on the ice. The ice was a real equalizer. No, I did not play golf. I had a wonderful opportunity to learn when I was in Indonesia. There was a brand new golf course that the generals had built in Medan. I think it cost a dollar to play 18 holes. In the consulate our communicator was a young guy who was a very good athlete and a one or two handicap golfer. He wanted to teach me, and I had all the time in the world. Even under those circumstances, after one or two attempts I gave it up. I found it very frustrating. How about you? Are you a golfer?

Q: No, but I've had the same experience, a lot of guys say "oh; you've got to take this up."

LAMBERTSON: I think there are places, Korea possibly is one, Bangkok certainly would have been another, where it could have been quite useful to have played golf. I'd have gotten to know Suchinda, for example, much better had I been a golfer. But that would have been a huge sacrifice, so time consuming.

Q: I'm a baseball player myself.

LAMBERTSON: In any event, Korea was a comfortable place to get back into. After all, I'd left the desk only a little more than a year and a half earlier and so I knew the issues pretty well. I knew the people in our embassy and in the government. It didn't seem like new territory. It was a comfortable move.

Q: Were you, I mean you were there just for a very short period of time before you got your next assignment. Did you actually get a chance to sort of settle down into a routine and start up the contacts?

LAMBERTSON: I did, but again it wasn't very long into that tour when I was pretty sure that Gaston (Sigur, Assistant Secretary for East Asia and Pacific Bureau) was going to ask me to come back and be a DAS (Deputy Assistant Secretary). I think by the summer of '86 I knew that in '87 I was probably going to be out of there which, among other things, caused me to give up my futile efforts to learn Korean in the early morning before the office opened. Korea was always going to be a sort of transitional thing for us. I knew fairly early on that the tour was not going to last very long.

Q: You mentioned that Kim Dae Jung came back into your life?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, Kim Dae Jung by that time was back in Korea and out of jail, but still considered poisonous by the Chun Doo Hwan government. As the July 4...

Q: Dixie was called in?

LAMBERTSON: Dixie was called in by the Prime Minister, Noh Sin Yong, who was a former KCIA director, but a modern man and a sophisticated man. I went with Dixie. Noh pleaded with him not to invite Kim Dae Jung to our National Day party because it would be too grave an insult to Chun Doo Hwan and would spark domestic unrest, etc. He made various arguments, with great passion. Dixie was noncommittal but gave no indication that he was going to change his mind. It was remarkable how much emotional ardor was wrapped up in that on the Korean side. We did do it, of course, and Kim Dae Jung came to the party, was there briefly and left, and life continued to go on in Korea. But I think the repercussions were quite severe within the Korean government.

Q: We get to vote in other peoples' elections.

LAMBERTSON: Yes. It was really quite unpleasant and an interesting example of the mindset of Chun Doo Hwan and to some extent of the intensity of Korean politics. Koreans take things very seriously, whether it's something like that, or this Olympic gymnastics dispute that just happened. I am sure there have been demonstrators at the embassy over that as well.

Q: Recent history has left them with some interesting circumstances. Take their attitude toward Japan.

LAMBERTSON: Their history has been awful. It still affects them.

Q: It's interesting that we notice these things in other societies and don't notice it in our own. During the current campaign season there was heated talk in the Op-Ed pages about flying a Confederate flag. The American Civil War was 150 years ago and yet people get quite emotional from time to time. But, if the Koreans fuss about something that was 100 years ago we'd say, "oh, get over it."

LAMBERTSON: That's a good point.

Q: Let's see. Yes, I think the Shultz visit was on March 6th of '87.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, I left Korea in the spring of '87. It was literally weeks after I left that the political situation began to finally break loose, in part because of the calendar and the required timing of the transition. I was with Gaston by then, and at the first ASEAN meeting I attended, in Manila, when Chun Doo Hwan was confronted with massive demonstrations and Sigur decided to go there from Manila to talk to Chun and try to assert some constructive American influence in the situation, and he did a good job of it.

Q: Moving back a little bit, you were mentioning in Australia one of the things as DCM that you worked with was the military in these joint facilities we have with the Australians. In Korea there is a major military presence and as DCM you now have liaison with USFK.

LAMBERTSON: USFK, the 8th Army, the CINC.

Q: Who was the...

LAMBERTSON: That's all being downgraded as part of the reorganization in Korea, finally.

Q: Yes. Who was there at the time?

LAMBERTSON: General Livsey. Jack Livsey, a very brash, soldier's soldier type guy, smart. Embassy-USFK liaison was effected in many ways. There was a POL/MIL section that worked with its contacts. We had Intel people who connected with J-2 out there, and no doubt there were various other kinds of connections. We also had regular meetings between the ambassador and CINC, a weekly breakfast. Then I also had a breakfast on a weekly basis with the deputy, who was a three star air force general, and a mild mannered man who I could relate to more easily than I could to Livsey. I don't recall any serious issues between the embassy and USFK during that short tour of mine.

Q: But it's interesting at an administrative level, you're both making an effort to make sure that you're talking with each other, that you have a regular time to meet so that you can march in lock-step because I would assume if you were to get out of step with each other the impact on what the Koreans would see would be pretty significant.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, that's absolutely right and it still happens from time to time, even recently. I recall within the last couple of years, the CINC made a speech on the security situation, and it seemed to me that if he cleared it with anybody it must only have been in Doug Feith's office. I think the embassy-military relationship was pretty successful during the time that I was there. There had been some colorful people through there as CINC over the years, and a few of them had been a little hard to deal with. One of the best was General Jack Vessey, later Chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

Q: Was General Gary Luck there?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, he was. When I was DCM he was commander of what I believe was called the First Field Force, a combat arm up there in the Chorwon Valley north of Seoul. He was a two star then. Later he was head of the Special Operations Command.

Q: Later I think, because I was at the Korea desk in the Pentagon later, he was CINC. But as we were saying, the Seoul tour actually gets kind of wedged in there.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, it was wedged in between other things.

Q: Other things and that other thing is you're asked to come back to the East Asia bureau as the deputy assistant secretary.

LAMBERTSON: Yes. I met Gaston for the first time when I was country director for Korea and he was the NSC East Asia man in the Reagan White House, so I knew him a little bit. In any event, for one reason or another he decided he'd like to have me in that job. I replaced John Monjo.

Q: Oh, yes.

LAMBERTSON: John went out to be ambassador to Malaysia. He later went to Indonesia. I got back to Washington in March, I think in late March, and I almost immediately turned around and headed back out for a visit to my new area.

Q: What the reader has to understand is there are about three deputy assistant secretaries in the bureau and each of those are responsible for...

LAMBERTSON: We were set up with four at the time. Stape Roy, whose portfolio was China, Taiwan and Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific. Bill Clark was the senior DAS and had Japan, Korea and other things. Mine was Southeast Asia. Then we had an economic deputy, Bill Piez. A total of four deputy assistant secretaries. Those have been changed around. I think they've now combined Southeast Asia and Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific. When I was there I just had Southeast Asia, the ten countries of Southeast Asia.

Q: In one sense, in a paper flow sense for the researcher, does that mean that something coming up from the Cambodia desk or the Thai desk goes through you before it hits Gaston? There's a signature block for you.

LAMBERTSON: Yes. Yes, usually.

Q: Also, you're watching what they're doing and you're passing things down to them.

LAMBERTSON: That's right. There's a good deal of that; there's a lot of territorial scope to the job and a fair amount of responsibility. I liked the job very much.

Q: On your orientation tour of April of '87, you had Bangkok, Jakarta and Manila as the key posts. How were things settling out? What did you perceive as some of the problems you were going to have to pay attention to? I keep forgetting to ask at the end what was the difference between when you started and when you left, but I'll try and figure that out later.

LAMBERTSON: Well, in Korea the main difference is that we were a year closer to some kind of political change.

Q: You said that and I haven't followed up properly. Chun Doo Hwan had a time limit on his incumbency?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, he became president by some process in 1980 for a seven year term.

Q: He got trapped in a term limit argument.

LAMBERTSON: He protested his legitimacy throughout his tenure and part of being legitimate is stepping down when your term is up, so that was what was coming up.

Q: Sorry to jump back and forth through that, but you were deputy assistant secretary for Southeast Asia. You've hit these countries. It's late Reagan administration, it's 1987, let's see Iran and Iraq is still going on. Worldwide that's impacting on oil prices and stuff. Within East Asia are there sort of general trends that you're concerned about?

LAMBERTSON: Well, the most active set of problems was in Bangkok because of the Cambodian War. That was clearly going to be a priority, that issue. Bill Brown was still the ambassador there. Dan hadn't gotten there yet.

Q: Brown was shortly to leave. They gave him the Moscow Embassy problem.

LAMBERTSON: Oh, yes, that's right. Then he went to Israel.

I don't recall any big pending issues in Jakarta. Paul Wolfowitz was by then ambassador. It was interesting for me to be back in Indonesia for the first time since I'd been stationed there. I tried out my Indonesian in a press encounter. Paul was impressive, I thought, in his role as ambassador. He'd been studying Indonesian and had made a good deal of progress. His wife was a specialist in Javanese culture. She'd done an AFS stint there and then it continued as an academic interest, and I believe she spoke and wrote Javanese. Paul knew the people and had a very sophisticated take on all the issues. He was a good ambassador. I remember I stayed in his residence in one of his guestrooms and it was lined with shelves filled with books, and I looked at the books on those shelves hoping to find some pulp novel that I could read myself to sleep with. There was nothing of that nature. He is a brilliant and a very serious-minded man. He was impressive as an ambassador - as he had been as assistant secretary at a very young age. I remember being around Paul more than anything else about that brief stopover in Indonesia.

In the Philippines I talked to a lot of peopland the Filipinos are very easy to talk with. Nick Platt was the Ambassador. He had a couple of active years ahead of him, thanks to those various Filipino dissidents who tried to overthrow Cory Aquino, repeatedly.

Q: But you were mentioning a minute ago that Cambodia and the whole issue there was going to be one of your major problems. We may not in the future understand it as well, but there're a number of actors in the Cambodian thing if you'd like to explain who was doing what to whom, and the basic issue was the Vietnamese had invaded Cambodia.

LAMBERTSON: The Khmer Rouge had taken over in 1975, when Saigon also fell, and their relations with the Vietnamese became increasingly strained, to the point that in 1978 Vietnam invaded Cambodia and drove the Khmer Rouge from power and installed a government led by a former KR commander, the Hun Sen government - and they occupied Cambodia with as many as 250,000 troops. It was a big force. By 1987 there were still 200,000 Vietnamese troops in Cambodia and indeed in a small sliver of Thai territory over near the Laotian-Cambodia border. So, when that happened, in 1978, Thailand was alarmed. Other ASEAN countries were alarmed. They quickly repaired their somewhat strained relations with the United States, and we began cooperating with them and they with us in efforts both diplomatic and military to get the Vietnamese out of Cambodia. That included a UN resolution which allowed the Khmer Rouge to keep the UN seat. That happened before the Reagan administration came into office. There was an annual resolution that ASEAN skillfully put together that would always pass overwhelmingly condemning the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. On the ground in Cambodia and in neighboring Thailand, there was a program of support for the non-Khmer Rouge resistance groups. The Khmer Rouge were amply supported and supplied by China. The Khmer Rouge operated out of a headquarters in Pailin, near the Thai-Cambodia border. But quite apart from the KR, the United States, working with its ASEAN friends, supported two separate non-communist resistance factions, one of them a royalist group called FUNCINPEC-Unified Front for the Liberation of Cambodia or something to that effect, and the other one being the KPNLF which was a nationalist, non-communist, non-royalist group. The United States supplied only non-lethal assistance to those two groups. They got their weapons elsewhere - from China or other sources, but not from the United States. Support for FUNCINPEC and the KPNLF, which we called the non-communist resistance or NCR for short, was carried out basically through intelligence channels in Thailand. To sum up, there was an active program of support for the non-communist resistance, and a continuing low intensity war against the Vietnamese and the Cambodian government which the Vietnamese had established inside Cambodia. That was pretty much the situation when I became DAS in 1987.

Q: The role of the Khmer Rouge, which already had a very bad reputation, strikes me as creating a real dilemma...

LAMBERTSON: Yes, how can one support the non-communist resistance without in effect supporting the Khmer Rouge? We were fighting the Khmer Rouge's enemy. That was a very good question.

Q: Diplomatically as you said in the UN the Khmer Rouge was the guy who legally was the representative, so...

LAMBERTSON: Was the representative, yes. It was not a very neat or clear cut problem.

Q: Let's get the Washington players in this problem identified, because there's you trying to figure it out, congress's pressuring, holding meetings?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, there was a lot of congressional interest in Cambodia. I remember it being particularly from the House side, and the leading player and a driving force in Congress on foreign policy issues was Steve Solarz, who was the chairman of the East Asia subcommittee of what was then called the House Foreign Affairs Committee. He was alarmed by the possibility of the Khmer Rouge ever returning to power. He felt it should be the United States' most fundamental objective to prevent that ever from happening. We, too, felt that that this was an important and fundamental objective and tried to assure him that we were as serious about it as he was. There were others. There was Chet Atkins, who represented a district in Massachusetts with lots of Cambodians. He was extremely interested in the problem, and unlike Solarz, he would get emotional about it from time to time. Tom Lantos, then and now a human rights advocate, was actively involved in the issue. So there was a lot of interest on the Hill and among foreign policy groups of one kind or another in Washington.

Q: Did this interest express itself in their holding hearings?

LAMBERTSON: There would be fairly frequent hearings, letters, phone calls.

Q: That's how they'd tell you?

LAMBERTSON: Yes.

Q: So, that's one ear cocked in that direction.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, indeed. Solarz in particular was always extremely knowledgeable. He had good sources and he kept closely in touch with people within the administration and interested people outside. He was always impressively well informed. It was a real challenge to go before a congressional hearing he chaired. I came to enjoy it, though, and I came to like him. I think it was a real loss to the country when he got gerrymandered out of his district, which happened about six or eight years ago, maybe longer.

Q: That's later than this period, but it's an interesting point you're making. Pressure from a well-informed source versus somebody who is a little more emotionally involved and who isn't necessarily as informed or sophisticated in their understanding of how to get out of some of these things. Congress is an actor; the White House is an actor. Isn't Karl Jackson...?

LAMBERTSON: Karl Jackson, when I became a DAS, was already the DAS in ISA for East Asia, working for Armitage who had by then moved up to be assistant secretary.

Q: Okay, he was at the Pentagon.

LAMBERTSON: Karl Jackson was very involved in the Cambodia problem and - have you known Karl for some time? He was a Thai academic specialist. I mean he wrote...

Q: I thought Karl was associated with the Jackson School at the University of Washington.

LAMBERTSON: I don't know about that. He was teaching at Berkeley when he came into the government, but he certainly is of that (Scoop Jackson) persuasion. He's close to Paul Wolfowitz. A good fellow. We did a lot of hearings together - on Cambodia, on POW/MIA issues too, and on the Philippines. We were a good tag team.

Q: Is that because the committee calls you or do you guys decide?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, the committee would call and I'd always be the lead witness and he'd always be the second.

Q: Okay, but the invitation was theirs?

LAMBERTSON: Yes. I think technically the Foreign Affairs Committee may not have had jurisdiction or protocolary power to invite a Defense Department witness. I'm not sure how that worked. In any event, if Solarz wanted a hearing, we were there. Not only for Solarz, but other people. Those three subjects, POW/MIA, Cambodia and then the Philippines were the three issues that took me up to the Hill fairly regularly and indeed dominated my work during those three years. I did about 35 congressional hearings.

Q: Was Karl your counterpart in ISA?

LAMBERTSON: Yes.

Q: We just talked about having regular meetings with your counterpart in Korea. Are you having a counterpart meeting, seeing him every third Tuesday?

LAMBERTSON: Not so much one-on-one. There were a lot of phone calls and we talked often in person, but we didn't have a regular meeting. What there was, was the "East Asia informal" meeting which happened weekly in Sigur's office and brought Defense, State, CIA, and the White House East Asia people together. When I went back there as a DAS those meetings would include, in addition to our EAP bureau DAS group, Jim Kelly who was the senior Asia guy in the White House, having replaced Gaston, who had become the Assistant Secretary. Karl Jackson who was DAS in ISA. Sometimes Rich - he liked to keep his East Asia hand in even though he was Assistant Secretary for ISA by then. Carl Ford who was the National Intelligence Officer for East Asia. And there would always be the East Asia man in DDO. Dick Childress, also of the NSC, attended - if not Jim Kelly, then Dick Childress, sometimes both.

Q: He was at the NSC at that time. He was quite involved with refugee stuff.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, and deeply involved in POW issues.

Q: Yes. So, Jim Kelly is at the White House and you're dealing with Cambodia.

LAMBERTSON: With Dick Childress more than Jim Kelly. Because Dick was the Southeast Asia guy.

Q: Okay, what kind of input is he making? And Karl Jackson, and actually let's get back to Karl. What is the Pentagon position on these Cambodian factions?

LAMBERTSON: All of us were in favor of continued support for the NCR and we were all kind of flummoxed about what to do about this problem in the long term. There had been unsuccessful efforts over the years to get some kind of negotiation going and that possibility was out there and needed to be addressed. The ASEAN countries were becoming increasingly interested in potential diplomatic solutions to the Cambodia problem. The Indonesians especially were quite active. The Thais worked at it, too, but the Indonesians were particularly interested in some sort of comprehensive, negotiated settlement to the problem. The Indonesian Foreign Minister, Alex Alatas, was a leader on the issue within ASEAN.

Q: Because from their point of view I mean the Americans were hard over on the Vietnamese. Americans were anti-Vietnamese, whatever that meant.

LAMBERTSON: You mean from the Indonesian perspective?

Q: Yes.

LAMBERTSON: The Indonesians always had a better relationship with Vietnam, for basic strategic and political reasons, than the other ASEAN countries did. They are an island nation. They never felt threatened by Vietnam in the way that Thailand always did, so they were more inclined to try and find some sort of solution that would respond to Vietnamese concerns.

Q: Their view of it is here you have the Vietnamese ensconced. The Americans are anti-Vietnamese whatever the consequences, and the object is, where is a Cambodian actor that ASEAN or somebody can support?

LAMBERTSON: We weren't "anti-Vietnamese", and I don't think we were seen that way by our ASEAN friends. Sihanouk was always viewed as the man who somehow something could be built around. Sometimes he would conduct himself in ways that gave credence to that idea and sometimes he would conduct himself oppositely. He was seen as a perhaps frail reed to lean upon, but it was always felt that in one way or another he was going to be at the center of a political deal.

Q: Actually everybody is pretty stuck and so the Vietnamese are.

LAMBERTSON: The Vietnamese finally began to view their occupation as a losing proposition; it was a major diplomatic hindrance to them, and a financial burden. So they began withdrawing troops. ASEAN takes notice and so do we, and that gives new impetus to possibilities for some sort of negotiation. That began to happen I guess in '87 or '88.

Q: From your point of view it's day-by-day meetings and what not that...

LAMBERTSON: I don't remember exactly the timeline when things happened. There was a general evolution toward negotiation and a lot of preliminary meetings in Jakarta and elsewhere that contributed to it. Cambodia was always a big subject in the annual ASEAN meetings and the meetings that were held in-between those annual affairs.

Q: That's interesting, because ASEAN itself only appears above the horizon at the close of the Vietnam War.

LAMBERTSON: It was the Cambodia issue that really gave ASEAN a noticeable profile. The ASEAN members collectively had real clout, and they used it very well. They were able not only to magnify their individual influence on the subject of Cambodia, by working together, but to develop much more influence in a general sense than they might otherwise have had. They were very skillful diplomatically in the way they planned their annual meetings, for example. Gradually those meetings became a "must do" thing for foreign ministers of big countries. It was interesting to see ASEAN evolve over the years.

Q: One of the other three main issues you were talking about which was highly contentious is POW/MIA. Now, there is a domestic issue of enormous import.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, it probably had a more emotional content then than it does now. There was a strong feeling among a lot of sensible people that we should have done more than we did, in the course of the Vietnam settlement itself and certainly in the immediate aftermath, to account for all the people who were lost over there. Accounting for lost soldiers just wasn't as important a part of the culture then as it now is. Now when our army goes to war, soldiers and families know that everybody is going to be accounted for when they come back, by one means or another. There were a lot of loose ends left on that issue in 1987, twelve years after the fall of Saigon. It had not been a high priority for Carter, for Dick Holbrooke, for Brzezinski, for Vance - for that administration. We were pretty close to normalizing relations with Vietnam without the POW/MIA issue having been addressed very satisfactorily. We would have normalized had the Vietnamese not invaded Cambodia in December of '78. That's my understanding at least. So, when Reagan came in there was a whole new approach, and the Reagan administration from its outset made this a serious issue. Dick Childress was the guy in the NSC who was orchestrating it. He worked closely with Ann Mills Griffith of the National League of Families, who is an extremely effective bureaucrat and for years might as well have been a member of the Administration. When I was there we treated her as such and she was actually a member of the interagency group that dealt with POW/MIA issues, which I chaired. She knew more about the issue than anybody else in the room and was a powerful advocate. She still is.

Q: The interagency group consisting of which agencies?

LAMBERTSON: Oh, there would have been State, CIA, the White House and probably more than one DOD representative.

Q: Meaning at your level, so it's Karl, you.

LAMBERTSON: Karl, me, Dick Childress, Ann and other odds and ends. Rich Armitage had already made a trip to Hanoi early in the Administration and Dick Childress had gone with him. They had kind of opened up the issue again, and by the time I came on board there was already talk of sending a presidential envoy to Hanoi to address this issue at a higher level and that took place later in the summer of '87. It was August of '87 when I went to Hanoi with the former JCS chairman, General Vessey.

Q: That's interesting. Let's focus on that trip. There's no Vietnamese Embassy...

LAMBERTSON: There is no Vietnamese Embassy.

Q: ...in Washington. They have to accept the proposition.

LAMBERTSON: The contacts were done through New York and possibly to some extent in Bangkok. The arrangements were made that way. Childress met with Vietnamese officials in New York.

Q: That we would send a presidential envoy.

LAMBERTSON: We made clear we expected some progress as a result of this, and that real progress could lead to a resolution of the issue, which for the United States was one of two issues standing in the way of normalization of relations - the other being Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia.

Q: So, in fact if they were stuck in Cambodia, the only place they could make some movement, they'd just been offered a new road. Now you take this trip to Hanoi. How does one get to Hanoi?

LAMBERTSON: We had a 707, a military version of a 707, a C-135, with some seats in it. We flew from Washington to Honolulu, overnighted there, had some talks with CINCPAC and then went to Bangkok. We overnighted in Bangkok and flew into Hanoi from there.

I remember there had been a fiasco in which a Delta Airlines flight had taken off from Atlanta and had landed in Charlottesville instead of Charlotte or something like that, and it was an incident that had been in the papers recently. So when we came down through the clouds toward this primitive airport at Hanoi, landed and pulled to a stop, the pilot came back and said, "Thank you for flying Delta. Welcome to Rangoon."

Q: Let's take a break. We're now talking about POW/MIA issues. At the time that you were there, those issues continued to have emotional overtones for a strong domestic lobby.

LAMBERTSON: Yes. Our objective was the "fullest possible accounting," which is not an unreasonable objective. There are plenty of people who think that the whole thing is kind of a contrived issue, but in fact, especially if you put yourselves in the shoes of a family member whose loved one never came home, it's a different story. Particularly in those many cases in which there was good evidence, including even photographs, of the person in question being held by North Vietnamese troops or authorities, and yet he didn't come home and his body was never recovered. Cases like that make it a valid issue and one I think has been worth pursuing. We took it seriously.

Q: Now, when is this that we're flying into Hanoi?

LAMBERTSON: This would have been August 1987.

Q: This is going to be a new start in the process of accountability.

LAMBERTSON: A presidential envoy, raising the issue to a higher level. As you suggested, making it clear to the Vietnamese that progress on the issue was a way to improve relations with the United States and that it would hasten the day when the relationship could be normal.

Q: Whom did you meet with?

LAMBERTSON: We met with the Minister of Interior, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and their people. Nguyen Co Thach was the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Vessey met with Vo Nguyen Giap, the old general who ran the war for the Vietnamese. I didn't sit in on that meeting. Several days of meetings. We stayed in the Vietnamese government guesthouse, downtown, near the downtown park and lake. Quite a rudimentary accommodation, but it was the best the Vietnamese had to offer at that time. This was before development began in Hanoi and fancy hotels began to be built. We took considerable care in keeping our internal communications confidential, using something General Vessey brought along - covered microphones to speak into, and earphones, so we could talk among ourselves in the guesthouse without being overheard by our hosts. We also had on that trip - the Vietnamese had to be pretty impressed by this - a suitcase satellite transmitter that I had never seen before. It worked reasonably well and we were able to send a couple of classified messages home.

Q: How would you characterize these initial discussions? What were the Vietnamese interested in? I suppose or what were they able to...

LAMBERTSON: The Vietnamese position on POW/MIAs has always been a little bit of a puzzle to me. I was of the view then, and still am today, that they could do better than they have done - because much of what we want is simply information that they have in their archives, and they're reluctant to really open up those archives and show them to us. That's the main thing we were pressing for in fact. We also got agreement from the Vietnamese for more so-called "field activities" in which we would send people in and they would go out to the countryside with Vietnamese counterparts and sift through the soil in an attempt to find remains. But the real trove of information was the archives, and we wanted the Vietnamese to be more forthcoming. I think after that visit they were to some extent, but we had to keep pushing, including over a couple or three more such visits for them to loosen up even more.

Q: Well, it's interesting in that we're talking archives because at first blush one might not assume that meticulous archive keeping was a Vietnamese specialty. Germans yes, but third-world countries?

LAMBERTSON: The Vietnamese were very fastidious about keeping records of who they had and what happened to them. We know that the Khmer Rouge were, too, when they were killing people in Tuol Sleng Prison. They documented everything. The Vietnamese had good records. They have good records. That's what we were trying to get at. We then had intermittent lower-level contacts, and then another Vessey mission, I think the following year, and then a third trip that I made with Winston Lord when he was the Assistant Secretary in the Clinton administration. That was the last time I went to Hanoi in this business, sometime in 1993 as I recalwhen I was in Bangkok. The visits produced incremental results. General Vessey felt that the Vietnamese performance had improved more than Ann Mills Griffith and Dick Childress thought, and I tended to agree with the latter two. I continue to believe that the Vietnamese weren't cooperating as much as they could have. General Vessey dropped out of the process; I think he was satisfied that he had done all that he could do, and he was anxious to get back to his home on a lake in Minnesota. I have great admiration for him. But there was still work to be done. There's still work to be done, even today.

Q: It's probably become more regularized. Isn't that always the process we see?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, we have normalized relations now and an embassy there and an ambassador in place, and this should be one of his central issues.

Q: Now, as you're dealing with POWs, you're having the regular meetings with Ann, so there's that constant...

LAMBERTSON: There were regular hearings. There was an ad hoc committea congressional task force - on POW/MIAs and it had slightly different rules from normal committees. As I recall, it was co-chaired by the senior Democratic and Republican members - Solarz being the Democrat. For a long time Ben Gilman of New York was the Republican. We did a lot of congressional appearances on that issue also-myself, Karl Jackson and Ann Mills Griffith. It was an interesting and rather rewarding thing to be working on. I enjoyed my contacts with the families. They were admirable people and were very grateful for anything we could produce. The National League of Families is responsible, more than any other organization or even the government itself, in my opinion, for changing the way our country views the question of accountability.

Q: Now, down at the desk level, there is one individual who does nothing but POW/MIAs?

LAMBERTSON: I think there was one man on the Vietnam desk whose primary responsibility was POW/MIA. It might have been Michael Marine during those years - who is now going to be the new ambassador, I understand.

Q: Excellent. Another good China hand. That's how I look at it, yes. I think he was deputy on the China desk for a little while or political chief.

LAMBERTSON: Let me get back before we go too much further, to Cambodia, because of my triumvirate of issues, Cambodia was the most time-consuming during my DAS years. The overall situation was more or less as I tried to describe it when we were talking yesterday, but this too was an issue where there was a lot of interest and pressure from the Hill and from other quarters in Washington - because of the existence of the Khmer Rouge, because the Khmer Rouge were still part of the equation. This was an issue people got emotional about. We clearly needed to have a political settlement. It was clear that you couldn't simply pretend the Khmer Rouge no longer existed, because they were such a key part of the equation, unfortunately. The problem was to try to devise some kind of scheme that would permit a transition toward peace while making sure that the Khmer Rouge remained corralled in Pailin.

In the first attempt at this - and this evolved from preliminary meetings that were initiated and led by the Indonesianthe goal was a four-party coalition government, including the Hun Sen regime, the Khmer Rouge and the two non-communist factions, with some type of built-in guarantees against the Khmer Rouge increasing their share of the power. That's what the 1989 conference in Paris was about - an effort to reach agreement on a four party coalition government. It just never got off the ground. We didn't make much progress in Paris because of disagreements between ourselves and the Chinese - and between others and the Chinese - about the role of the Khmer Rouge and how they were to be fitted into this process. I led our delegation, and we had an interesting month in Paris. But the effort collapsed.

In the remaining months of 1989 there was increasing talk of a UN-administered peace in Cambodia. This was a new idea, and something the UN really had not done up to then. There had been UN peacekeeping operations, but there hadn't been much in the way of a United Nations transitional administration of a formerly warring area. It looked like it was going to be very expensive and unwieldy and probably wouldn't work - but it was nevertheless talked about more and more. The people who first put it on the table were the Australians. Then Steve Solarz picked up the idea and began to talk it up in Washington, and it gained more traction.

In December of '89, right after the last coup attempt against Cory Aquino - and I had been working completely on Cory Aquino preservation matters for about two weeks - I had a commitment to go to Boston and participate with Solarz and Chet Atkins, Congressman from Massachusetts, in a panel discussion at Harvard on Cambodia. I was kind of worn out and had a bad cold and it was not a very auspicious trip for me, but I took part. (I did some notes for myself, literally on the back of an envelope, during the flight from Washington. When I sat down at the dais next to Solarz, I glanced at his papers and saw that he would be speaking from a typed text labeled "third draft".) Solarz again raised the idea of a United Nations administered peace for Cambodia, and asked what the Administration's position was. We didn't have a position at that time. We hadn't taken one. But I said the idea of a United Nations administration was a good one and we ought to explore it. I endorsed Solarz' proposal. I did that also within the bureau, and I wasn't by any means the only one who had begun to think that this was the way we should be moving. As I recall, Charlie Twining, the Country Director for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia had been pushing the idea. In any event, shortly thereafter we signed on to the concept of a UN administered solution for the Cambodia problem. This was over the strong objection of John Bolton, who was at the time Assistant Secretary for IO, and his deputy.

Q: What was the basis of their concern?

LAMBERTSON: I think cost, unwieldiness, dangerous precedents, etc.

Q: So, here's the assistant secretary for IO who didn't really...

LAMBERTSON: He didn't want a UN-administered solution. In any event, that is the solution that emerged and was pursued in talks and then eventually in, what was it, September of '91, about the time I went to Bangkok, agreed to in another Paris conference. Cambodia was an interesting issue because it was so complex. We did have a rather ambivalent position that we were pursuing. We were supporting the non-communist resistance with non-lethal supplies, that is to say no guns or ammunition. They were fighting the same enemy that the Khmer Rouge were fighting. Our friends, the Thai were certainly facilitating supplies, the flow of supplies to the Khmer Rouge from China. It was a messy situation to say the least. A lot of people felt that our policy was simply another example of a mindless anti-Vietnamese crusade. They were wrong.

Q: In addition to that though, you're mentioning that our assistance is non-lethal assistance. Now, that requirement comes from other American experiences, doesn't it? I mean why isn't it lethal?

LAMBERTSON: You mean from the Iran-Contra years?

Q: Or whatever. I mean aren't in fact some prior foreign policy experiences when digested by the decision making community in Washington, the basis for new policy guidelines? So in this case you can help out, but it has to be non-lethal. Hence the U.S. policy toward non-lethal has nothing to do with the contemporary issue. It has to do with adjusting to some prior circumstance.

LAMBERTSON: I suppose that's true to some extent. There was never much interest in increasing or changing the nature of our assistance to the non-communist resistance during the time that I was in that job. We thought about it once or twice, but it didn't make sense. Among other things, not only was previous experience I suppose in the back of everyone's mindmore the war in Vietnam rather than Iran-Contra - the reality in Washington and in the congress was that this would not have flown and could not seriously have been pursued. None of us envisaged Sihanouk riding into Phnom Penh in a tank, however well-appointed the tank might be. That wasn't going to be the way things worked out. We were pretty realistic about the military capabilities, particularly of the FUNCINPEC forces. The KPNLF actually were pretty good. The idea was to keep them minimally credible militarily, so that when a political settlement emerged they could be players in it. They could have a seat at the table. That objective was achieved in the final analysis. Our policy was successful. The KR were defeated politically.

Q: Why didn't the Vietnamese help out by knocking out the Khmer Rouge? I mean if they had 200,000 troops...

LAMBERTSON: They tried. The Khmer Rouge were good fighters and the Vietnamese were in something of a quagmire in Cambodia. They were hampered by the fact that the Cambodians dislike Vietnamese.

Q: You shouldn't invade a country that doesn't like you?

LAMBERTSON: Many Cambodians may by then have loathed and feared the Khmer Rouge, but they also loathed the Vietnamese. The Khmer Rouge were able to swim in that sea. That's why the Vietnamese couldn't do it. It was not for lack of trying. The Khmer Rouge in 1987 remained a very impressively capable guerrilla force and a rather large one. You couldn't put together a political settlement without taking that into account. It was an interesting problem.

Q: Let me ask you a sort of INR question. Chinese support for the Khmer Rouge. Were we viewing that as communists-to-communists or Chinese anti-Vietnamism? I mean the Chinese had fought...

LAMBERTSON: It was Chinese anti-Vietnamism, and Chinese anti-Sovietism as well. It was odd the way that relationship played itself out in that unfortunate corner of the world.

Q: The actor the Chinese picked to associate with might have been picked just because they were the most effective military force and could have done the most damage to the Vietnamese. It turned out that fighting force was the Khmer Rouge, the rest may have been somewhat immaterial.

LAMBERTSON: Well, there was also an ideological factor, the KR had long-standing connections with the Chinese communist party. We would from time to time go to the Chinese, and ask them to start pulling the plug on supplies to the Khmer Rouge in order to hasten the day when a political settlement might be achievable. The Chinese were always totally non-responsive, and always stressed that the KR had to have a role in any political settlement. Until then, the supply line stayed open. That's what I was doing in Beijing in 1988, June of 1988. I went there to talk to a Chinese vice minister about Cambodia. I spent about two hours with him and don't recall that I left with any kind of encouraging message. The Chinese kept insisting that the KR had to be part of the settlement process.

Q: So, we'd been talking to the Chinese through the embassy.

LAMBERTSON: Oh, sure.

Q: Now, there was this highlighted specified trip so they'd have to focus on the issue. You were mentioning if the Thai were an actor in this, we also probably were pulsing the Thai from time to time?

LAMBERTSON: Indeed. Thailand's relationship with the Khmer Rouge was a point of sensitivity with us and something that we kept tweaking the Thai on during those three years I was in Washington and also when I was in Bangkok. We know that the Thai army had regular and friendly contacts with the Khmer Rouge leadership. We were never able to pin down some of the wilder allegations, such as that Pol Pot actually lived in Thailand, in a compound down there in the southeast corner of the country. We tried to track down such allegations when I was in Bangkok, with all the resources we had, and we could never verify most of the rumors that were accepted as fact by the media among others.

Q: At that time was Prasong still in the NSC?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, he was when I was DAS. By the time I got out there as ambassador he was not, but he was still very active in politics.

Q: In politics and he was particularly concerned with refugee issues if I recall. He held our feet to the fire about every promise we ever made. In fact he was there from the fall of Saigon to probably the end of his tour. My understanding is that he remained in that position by telling his colleagues the Americans made promises to me on refugees and I'm going to see that they fulfill it.

LAMBERTSON: A very interesting man.

Q: Did any Thai refugee issues come up during your DAS period?

LAMBERTSON: Oh, I'm sure they must have. I can't think of any specifics, but yes, I'm sure they would have. We were always concerned about the maintenance of first asylum, especially in Thailand, and of course the need for the steady resettlement of refugees from the first asylum countries. I participated in a UNHCR refugee conference in Geneva, in 1988 I believe. Maintenance of first asylum was one of the main topics. Eagleburger led that delegation.

Q: It's my impression that the Vietnamese refugees from the fall of Saigon were a different group from the later Vietnamese boat people. That in the 1980s the refugee flow changed. Lao and Laotian hill tribes joined the refugee camps in Thailand?

LAMBERTSON: In 1987, and this was true when I went to Bangkok four years later, we had approximately 300,000 Cambodians in those big camps along the Thai-Cambodia border. They were regarded as displaced persons, not refugees, because they would be going home when circumstances allowed. We had many thousands of Hmong at Ban Vinai up along the Mekong and also at a temple complex in the interior of Thailand. We had sizeable numbers of Karen and other Burmese ethnic groups along the Thai-Burma border. It was quite an interesting mixture. We also had a sizeable number of Vietnamese who had not yet found permanent refuge. I don't know the numbers on Vietnamese refugees, but we were still regularly getting people who had arrived there by land. They'd come across Cambodia.

Q: I think the refugee counselor in Bangkok at that time was Lacy Wright. '86-'87 sort of period.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, I believe that's right.

Q: The refugees were always one of those friction points between ourselves and the Thai and as I recall Prasong was the one that the embassy worked very closely with to coordinate our policies. His job was to keep us honest as he saw it in terms of the promises that we had made about our responsibilities. By then a lot of these things, a lot of these camps had been there since the '70s so they were very well set up. It was all covered by the UN. You had individual NGOs. One NGO would do water, another would do waste, another would be immunizations, another would do education. It was a very well set up sort of circumstance.

Something you mentioned earlier, the copious amounts of time the Department spent trying to save Cory Aquino. How did those issues arise?

LAMBERTSON: Cory Aquino had become president, when, in 1986, as a result of the "EDSA Revolution," people power in the Philippines. She was immensely popular in the Philippines and she was incredibly popular in the U.S. congress. She made a visit to Washington shortly after taking office in Manila and was given what Bob Dole called a "$200 million honorarium" for her speech before Congress. As time wore on, she proved to be somewhat ineffective in asserting control over dissident forces within the Philippine military. While I was DAS, I believe there were no fewer than three rather serious coup attempts against Cory Aquino, two of them carried out by the same guy.

One of the frustrating things about the Philippines was that the Filipinos didn't seem to take these things seriously enough, not as seriously as we did. The perpetrators of coup attempts somehow found themselves back on the street after a few months, ready to do it again. Some of these, a couple of these incidents were rather bloody. A number of people got killed. Buildings were destroyed. Artillery was fired and it was ugly. Nick Platt was the ambassador, Ken Quinn was his DCM and they got very good at dealing with American community concerns during fighting-in-the-street situations. They could have written a book on it by the time they left. The last and I think the most serious attempt against Cory Aquino's presidency came in December of 1989. I think there were a somewhat larger number of military units involved and it seemed to be more threatening. There were reports that the Philippine air force, such as it was, was going to send planes up in support of the rebels. So we had a flight of F-4s take off from Clark and they patrolled the skies over Manila to keep the Philippine air force on the ground. That was our most direct intervention in one of those situations. That one, like all the previous ones, failed and not too long thereafter Cory Aquino's term came to an end.

Eddie Ramos, West Point graduate and head of the Philippine Constabulary, took over and that was a good stable period for Philippine politics. It was interesting. I developed an affectionate view of the Filipinos. They had a real, functioning democracy once again, despite the fact that some people wearing uniforms didn't like that fact. The country seemed to me to be suffering in many ways, in terms of economic growth and social development, but they were justifiably proud of their democracy. They played the democratic game in a very enthusiastic way and you couldn't help but be impressed. I always felt we were doing the right thing, even though it was kind of frustrating and tiresome when it began to be repetitious, to continue to support Cory Aquino.

Q: When these kinds of Philippine crises come up I'm reminded that we were mentioning earlier that you and Eagleburger and Phil Habib were in the Ops Center at the time that Saigon fell. Now, here's, ten years later, more than ten years later, a crisis in the Philippines. Are you going up to the Ops Center, is a telephone being used better, what's the technical difference?

LAMBERTSON: There was an Ops Center group, a Task Force. We had a great Country Director, by the waCharlie Salmon. He was a terrific help to me. We had very good communications, easy secure telephone communications with Nick Platt and Ken Quinn. So, I'm sure things worked more smoothly than in the old days. During one of these coup attempts, the final one in '89, the President had just left the country on a trip to Europe, so Dan Quayle was the "principal" in the White House and we set up a video conference, which was a brand new thing then. A secure video conference. Pentagon, State and the White House, and I suppose the CIA. Quayle chaired the meeting - I understand it is mentioned in his book, as an example of his ability to take charge in a crisis - and indeed he did a fine job. That was one innovation that certainly didn't exist at the time of the fall of Saigon.

Before I leave this period of my life, let me mention my trip, actually I had two trips, to Asia with Quayle. As a result of that exposure to him, I developed a highly favorable opinion of the man. By the time we did this, Karl Jackson, my old DOD colleague was his foreign policy advisor. The first time we went out must have been early in the Bush administration, because Gaston Sigur went with us and Gaston didn't stay too long after that transition. Gaston was replaced by Winston Lord at some point in '89.

Q: Yes, let me look that up.

LAMBERTSON: Gaston was along on this trip. In any event, it was interesting to me because there was some domestic politics mixed up with it. We took off from Andrews Air Force Base in the morning and landed in Chicago, not at O'Hare, but maybe a military facility, got in a helicopter, flew to downtown Chicago, right down there among the skyscrapers, landed in an open area, motorcaded to a hotel, went in through the kitchen like politicians do, and Quayle gave a speech to a rather large group. Then we got back on the plane, after visiting a high school out in the suburbs of Chicago, and flew to California where we repeated the same scenario at the Beverly Hills Hotel. Pete Wilson and others were involved.

We got on the airplane about 11:00 PM California time and flew to Honolulu where we had a briefing by CINCPAC, around 3:00 AM Honolulu time, and a basketball game. Quayle was a good athlete and played a good game of basketball. Then we got back on the airplane and flew to American Samoa, where he made some remarks in which he referred to the throng before him as looking like a group of "happy campers." This phrase was reported in the press and contributed rather unfairly to Dan Quayle's lore.

In any event, after the American Samoa stop, we got back on the airplane and flew to Canberra where we finally got off the damn thing and could have a shower. That was a 44 hour trip and it was really quite grueling.

Quayle did a good job in his meetings with foreigners. He, for example, met with the Australian press corps in Canberra and I knew them to be a pretty obstreperous bunch of people and he handled that situation quite well. He did well again in Singapore where he had a meeting with Goh Chok Tong, the recent prime minister, and Brigadier General Lee, who is now the brand new prime minister of Singapore. He just took over last month. The subject was the press, and Quayle was making the case for greater freedom of the press - and that's not something that's integral to the Singapore system. Lee and Goh argued vociferously against what Quayle was proposing, but he stood his ground. He was quite articulate, and he didn't back down. He was personally very easy to get along with. Clearly he was quite comfortable in having some very smart people around him, including Karl Jackson and Bill Kristol, who was his chief of staff. I thought Quayle was quite all right.

Q: Actually you yourself had an interesting experience in Singapore.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, I did. I visited Singapore in the summer of '88, and as a routine part of a visit like that, the embassy set up a meeting for me with a dissident - they are pretty hard to find in Singapore, but there were a few. This was a young man, a frail young man who to me was quite unimpressive. We had about a half an hour talk in the lobby of a very fancy hotel in Singapore, after which I went back to the place I was staying and got in the swimming pool, which I wanted to do earlier. A few weeks later, Tommy Koh, the ambassador to the United States called me. He said he had to see (Secretary of State) George Shultz that very day. I said, can I help you? He said no, he had to see the Secretary. In any event George Shultz agreed to see Tommy Koh, which is indicative of the way Singapore, and Lee Kuan Yew, Harry Lee, as George Shultz knew him, were viewed by Shultz.

Q: Didn't you have to do a paper, read ahead?

LAMBERTSON: There wasn't time. It was a matter of phone calls upstairs. I didn't sit in. Gaston accompanied Tommy into the meeting with George and then told me about it later. Tommy Koh had delivered a letter to George Shultz from Lee Kuan Yew in which Lee Kuan Yew essentially said there was a group of officers in George Shultz's department that were seeking to destabilize his government and their names were Lambertson, Joe Snyder and Hank Hendrickson. Joe was the desk officer, Hendrickson the political counselor in Singapore. He said he would not disclose these names publicly in Singapore, but he assumed that Shultz would see to it that they were disciplined and that this sort of thing never happened again. I still have the original of the letter. Shultz was astounded by this. He thought he knew Harry Lee. I thought I knew something about Singapore, too, and I was shocked, truly. I'd been accused by a leader who I admired as much as I admired anybody in Asia of trying to undermine his government. So I felt kind of hurt by it all, and pretty damned mad also.

Clearly the dissident I met with had been questioned harshly. The Singaporean police authorities had their methods and they must certainly have been applied to this young man and he apparently made up a story about my having offered to fund a dissident political movement. The situation quickly escalated. The Singaporeans PNGed our political counselor, as if it were the Soviet Union during the Cold War. So, we had to PNG a great young officer from the Singapore Embassy.

Jesse Helms heard about all of this early on, through Bill Triplett. Bill Triplett was constantly on the phone to me demanding to know what I had done and why I was screwing up such an important and solid relationship. That's kind of the way those conversations went. Helms wrote a letter to Shultz condemning my arrogance and incompetence. It was just a generally unpleasant period. In Singapore, things got to be quite frenetic. I was referred to as Mr. X and this was the X, Y, Z problem in Singapore, their version of the X, Y, Z affair. Darryl Arnold, who was the ambassador there at the time made video tapes of the nightly television performances of Goh Chok Tong and the younger Lee. They were clearly trying to demonstrate to Singapore and to the United States - and especially I think to Lee Kuan Yew - that they were tough, that they were prepared to defend Singapore's interests and stand up to the United States, and their language was harsh.

As far as I know, Shultz never had any doubts about me. I don't believe he ever for a moment thought there was any truth to what Harry Lee put in his letter. He never gave any such indication. He was quite solid and just shook his head and wondered what the hell was going on out there. I think in retrospect there was one issue that might have contributed to the outburst. We had recently rescinded Singapore's GSP privileges. Do you remember what that was?

Q: Yes, general system of preferences. That means you get breaks on tariffs.

LAMBERTSON: You get breaks on certain things and by then Singapore no longer needed that kind of help and they were "graduated," that was the euphemism. And I think they were graduated without being adequately informed in advance. So they may have already been in a bad mood when I happened to go out there and meet with the dissident. In any event, the Singapore government vented and after awhile they calmed down and the relationship resumed its normal happy course, with I think, however, a more realistic appreciation on our side of whom we were dealing with out there, the nature of their corporate personality. I went to Singapore again not long after, this may have been the trip with Quayle, and we went to Lee Kuan Yew's residence and I sat across the table from him and he treated me as if nothing had happened. I think some Singaporean officials, two or three echelons down, were embarrassed by the whole thing, but I never found one who admitted he was. It was a Kafkaesque experience for me; I learned what it was like to be wrongly accused of something by someone who you in fact admired.

Q: But isn't that exactly a fascinating description, if you will, of the Foreign Service management of a diplomatic relationship? There was some ripple, it might have been the GSP, some domestic need, an actor on their side who decided to be a little more macho this week than last week, something else comes in and you've got to manage this so it doesn't spin out of control. All balanced by your respect for Singapore.

LAMBERTSON: True.

Q: A professional respect as well as a personal respect and therefore, you manage this relationship and you get over it because otherwise you're saying, well, I can be macho, too. Then, where are you?

LAMBERTSON: That's right.

Q: In fact at the same time it wasn't in your portfolio, well, wasn't this the time we've gotten crossways with the New Zealanders? Or mid-Reagan administration '85 to '86.

LAMBERTSON: That was earlier. Several years earlier.

Q: That kind of spun out of control.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, in both of those situations there were people in the congress who, had they been listened to, would have made things worse. You have pressures pushing you in a certain direction and you have to resist. Helms, of course, was siding with the Singaporeans. He would have been happy if I'd been fired. That would have been his preferred solution. Yes, you have to kind of absorb the blows and keep your eye on the bigger picture.

Q: Well, actually since Senator Helms had a black list of Foreign Service Officers who would be held under water, to the extent you later made ambassador, that probably is an indication that you didn't make the cut. And I note that Secretary Shultz in his book Turmoil and Triumph doesn't mention the Singapore incident.

LAMBERTSON: I must not have made that cut. I testified before Helms a number of times on Cambodia and I think he generally agreed with the administration's approach. On the Philippines and on POW/MIA issues too, he was comfortable with our positions and there was very little he objected to. But this Singapore thing was different. His man, Triplett, by the way, seemed to enjoy being disruptive.

Q: I think you'll find a lot of people who would go along with that. Something you just said though, is it a proper characterization of a Foreign Service career at this level of deputy assistant secretary that this is the point in one's career where one has a fairly robust exposure to the congress. You're going up to the Hill and testifying a lot. I mean desk officers don't. It's this deputy assistant secretary level and above, some of whom are career ambassadors or career people, and not necessarily political appointees.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, I think it's the level in the Department at which domestic politics really do begin to intersect with the work of Foreign Service professionals and yes, there is a lot of interaction with congress. I think there was more in my case than might have been normal because Gaston didn't mind somebody else going up there and doing it. He was well thought of on the Hill, but was in fact quite happy not to do the formal hearings. Moreover, he wasn't as absorbed personally by Cambodia as he was by what in fact were some of the larger, broader issues in his portfolio - relations with China, Japan, etc. He wasn't a Southeast Asia guy. When Dick Solomon came in and became the assistant secretary, Dick took a much more active interest in Cambodia. That was helpful in some ways to me and complicated my life in other ways.

Q: Let's get into that, let me put on the record that at this level of contact with congress it isn't just going up and testifying. I'm under the impression you also see staffers on the side or brief them on the side informally perhaps with other colleagues. So, there's a formal presentation to congress and then there's an informal presentation to congress, so that congress is a pretty major part of your life.

LAMBERTSON: Yes. Especially when you have a guy like Steve Solarz leaning forward a lot into your issues. I was especially careful to keep in close touch with him which meant going up to his office from time to time, just talking with him.

Q: To Richard Bush.

LAMBERTSON: With Richard Bush or Stanley Roth as well. Stanley of course felt he knew more than Steve Solarz did. That was a very good office and you needed to take it very seriously and I tried to do that.

Q: I think Solarz was pleased with the people he had brought together in support of the issues that were of interest to him. You were mentioning that Solomon came in and sort of had a different feel for some of the issues that you were involved in, and you had a little more hands off relationship with Gaston. Would you otherwise want to characterize their leadership styles?

LAMBERTSON: I thought Gaston was overall a more effective leader of the EAP bureau. Gaston never had a lot to say, but when he spoke there were always pretty good nuggets in there of advice and wisdom. Gaston was awfully well connected within the administration, for example with Colin Powell and Rich Armitage.

Q: Where does that connection come from?

LAMBERTSON: Gaston's connection with Colin Powell probably came through Rich, and he and Rich had been close for a number of years, I believe. Gaston was a man who knew who he was. I guess you'd say he was "centered." I liked him a lot. He was a very stable, good man. Dick was more verbal, and more like a policy wonk - he would have fit in well with the Clinton administration it seems to me. He would have enjoyed those all night talk sessions in the White House we used to read about.

Q: Well, actually both gentlemen were academics.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, they're both academics.

Q: Isn't Dick more or longer, I have Solomon...

LAMBERTSON: Dick was Michigan and I think Rand and a very solid academic, well respected as a Sinologist.

Q: Yes.

LAMBERTSON: Gaston had a different kind of academic background and a Japan specialty, but that's where they came from.

Q: GW now has the Sigur Center.

LAMBERTSON: That's right.

Q: In honor of him because I think when he left he joined them and then unfortunately he died very shortly thereafter.

LAMBERTSON: He'd been associated with GW a long time. The main operational difference from where I sat was in their differing personal interest in the Cambodia problem. Dick put it at the very top of his agenda. Others in the bureau complained sometimes that he was neglecting their issues, but he certainly wasn't neglecting Cambodia. He was an activist on Cambodia. He was always suggesting I should go here and do that, and he had some good ideas. He once sent me up to New York to meet with a fellow who had been for many years Undersecretary General in charge of peacekeeping in the United Nations, a Scandinavian, then working at the Ford Foundation in New York. I did that, and it was helpful.

On the other hand, Dick was willing to entertain what I thought were questionable ideas of how you went about solving a foreign policy problem. One day he introduced me to two Michigan political science professors, of the "quantitative" school, who had devised a system they believed could accurately predict the outcome of any international conflict if just the right information were entered in. So they wanted me to help them come up with the right "inputs" on Cambodia and they would then tell us how things were going to turn out. I was busy at the time and really didn't want to play that game and I did not. Dick realized it was counterproductive to insist that I should, so those people went out of my life. I should add that Dick was a very agreeable guy to be around; I liked him.

Q: Actually just as a segue to something else, I think I hear you saying that at points the leadership can be so overwhelmed by issues that triaging things...issues get left out? I mean can you overwhelm the bureau leaders, if not the department leaders, with so many issues, isn't there a point?

LAMBERTSON: In this case, I think from time to time Dick's understandable focus on Cambodia probably did cause him to neglect other maybe intrinsically more important things. I'd been on the other end of that, certainly when I was Korea country director. There were times when I should have gotten more attention for my issues than I did, and that was because the assistant secretary was working on China or Japan or something else. I think that happens all the time. There's always an ordering of priorities and a triage process that goes along with it. Any country director would tell you that. You've been in that kind of situation. You can't get the attention of the people whose attention you think you need.

Q: The point is, you need their attention because to move the process along, you've said what you've said at your level and that's blocked now.

LAMBERTSON: Something more needs to be done.

Q: Something more needs to be done in terms of raising it to the attention of the next level because the assumption is that the next level of people that look at it will add different weights to the issue and then therefore come to a potentially different interagency resolution, but if you can't get that attention or what not, then you're frozen. I mean you've done what you can do at your level in convincing your counterparts.

LAMBERTSON: Sometimes you have to push an issue to a higher level just to get a decision. And sometimes you just need advice, from someone whose job gives them a broader perspective.

Q: Did you ever have any time for exercise? Certainly there're no golf games. The DAS business sounds very consuming.

LAMBERTSON: It is very consuming and demanding. At one point when I was a DAS, Elliott Richardson was back in the Department, consulting with L (Legal Affairs) or something. He wrote an article for the Post or the Times on the Op-Ed page in which he was making the case for greater resources for the State Department, but he particularly cited the workload of DASs. (As a former country director, I would say that country directors have plenty to do to keep them busy also.) And he singled out the DAS for Southeast Asia, who had so many different problems to deal with. I thought, what an insightful individual Elliott Richardson is - because I did feel like I was pretty busy and doing rather important things. It was a great job in terms of substance and what I felt I was accomplishing. I think it was maybe the best I had, better than being ambassador, from a purely substantive standpoint.

Q: It's also a platform from which you're looking at another interesting issue that the professional Foreign Service is interested in and that's political appointees. You're getting political appointees as colleagues, as assistant secretaries, certainly the assistant secretary in Asia has been a political appointee since Habib or Marshall Green probably. Then you've got the ambassadors in the area. As those ambassadors come and go in your area, are you saying, gee I wish we could have given that to a career one?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, although you know the realities are the realities. It was very unlikely that a Foreign Service Officer was going to get to go to Australia for example, although a few years later that happened a couple of times. Singapore seemed to be pretty much lost to the career service. I think it will remain so. I think Stape was the last career guy there. Yes, you think about those things and you wish for a better situation and argue for it, but you're not surprised when you don't get it.

Q: Well, I mention it because it's my recollection that the Reagan administration was the one in which the volume if you will, percentage volume of political appointees was the highest. This had an unintended consequence for the career service because a new Foreign Service Act became effective in 1980. It adapted a military-like retirement systems that said certain class of officers, if not promoted within six years, would be dismissed. Six years after 1980 people started being dumped out of the Foreign Service in part because there were no promotions due to the large number of political appointees. Perhaps it didn't impact on Asia Pacific bureau as much as others.

LAMBERTSON: I think our ratio in '87 to '90 was probably about normal. We had political appointees in Singapore, Australia, Korea, and Japan of course, and China - but nothing out of the ordinary. I think that was probably about it.

Q: Thinking in a larger field from those early days in Saigon to now you're the Deputy Assistant Secretary, what have you learned so far?

LAMBERTSON: Well, I suppose I'd learned something about the limitations of American power. I learned that in Vietnam. I know I had learned an awful lot about how foreign policy is made, the nature of the foreign policy machine in Washington, DC, the role of the congress, the role of public opinion and the need to keep those realities in the forefront of your mind if you're thinking about doing something. I can't think of any great revelations, just sort of an incremental accumulation of perspectives that you build up from year to year as you're in this business.

Q: I asked the speculative question because at the end of being deputy assistant secretary, then you moved as Diplomat-in-Residence to Kansas University which must have given you finally some down time, some reflective time.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, it was a wonderful year.

Q: How did that come up?

LAMBERTSON: As my DAS term grew to a close there were no obvious onward assignments for me, that is to say there was no ambassadorial opening that I was interested in or thought I could get, and I left with a Distinguished Honor Award from Dick Solomon, which Matt Daley wrote up for me. He was Dick's special assistant. It was a very nice gesture by Dick - sort of a consolation prize for not having a joalthough I also felt I deserved it. I went off to the Diplomat-in-Residence program. I wanted to go back home. My parents were elderly. In fact my dad died during that year, so it was great for me to be able to be at home and see them regularly. I had a wonderful year at KU (University of Kansas).

I did a lot of outreach activity and odds and ends during the first semester and during the second semester I taught what I think was a pretty darn good course to about 50, mostly upper-level, undergraduates. By that time I'd been named ambassador. I had my confirmation hearing in April, right at the time KU was playing Duke for the national championship in our great sport. So, it was a memorable year. I got a lot of nice publicity out here, too. It was a very enjoyable experience all the way around. Sacie and I both had fun.

Q: I would suspect the average KU student's opportunity to actually see and touch a real life Foreign Service Officer is rare, because we were talking yesterday, there's 5,000 Foreign Service Officers and the population of the country is 280 million. Even the retirees are mostly gathered in Washington. When would you ever run into one?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, and that made it interesting for me.

Q: This Diplomat-in-Residence program is fairly extensive. I think there are ten or 15 positions around the country.

LAMBERTSON: The Director General at that time, Ed Perkins, really wanted me to go down to Atlanta, to go to a predominantly black institution. I can understand that, but I just wanted to come back to KU. I think in some respects this is just as valid a place to send someone like me or like you as is Morehead in Atlanta, in terms of providing exposure to people who are practitioners in the foreign policy business. There aren't a lot of them out here and it's good for students here to have that exposure - and I think it's good for us to see this part of the country. Ed, by the way, is in Oklahoma, isn't he? I think he's working at Oklahoma University.

Q: Yes. I think he is now. He's writing his memoirs because I know the Freedom of Information Office has been working long and hard on his request for his old documents. Jim Lilley did the same thing and what Jim did was have the Department collect them up and then he read them in a secure area and decided then which ones he wanted rather than keeping the whole thing.

LAMBERTSON: That's a good way to do it.

Q: Actually, it's a program that State has where presidential appointees, not staff but ambassador level people get access to their records on an expedited basis.

LAMBERTSON: That's good to know. What I've done over the years, and I've found a copy of what I'd done in Bangkok, as I'm packing out I go through the file and write down the numbers of telegrams that I think I might like to look at someday. I've got a list of numbers. That ought to help, right?

Q: Yes. Tom Barnes used to do that. So, you have this down time, you have this time, but you were saying, fairly early on you actually were offered an ambassadorial assignment. How does one...

LAMBERTSON: Yes, Ed Perkins called me, the president didn't call me. Ed Perkins called me and wondered if I would be interested in going to Thailand and I said I certainly would. The paperwork was done and I think it was made official and announced by the end of 1990, before Christmas of 1990. Then, as I said, my confirmation hearing was in April of '91 and it was a good hearing. Very good attendance by senators, a lot of interesting questions. It lasted more than an hour. John Kerry was probably the most persistent questioner. His questions were about Cambodia and Indochina policy basically. I enjoyed answering them.

Q: Certainly the Kansas senators must have been proud as punch.

LAMBERTSON: You bet. Dole introduced me and Nancy Kassebaum, who was a member of the committee, was there and had nice things to say. Jesse Helms was there and had nothing bad to say. It was an exhilarating experience. But then my nomination was held up.

Q: Before we get to there, you're a career Foreign Service Officer, you've worked all these issues, you've just been a DAS, so there's not much to preparing you to go up to the Hill?

LAMBERTSON: Not too much, although I'd been away from these issues for ten months by then. I'd been out in Kansas. I hadn't been working on Cambodia policy, for example, and there'd been some developments and I knew I was going to get questions relating to that, so I had to do a little reading. I had a briefing book.

Q: You came to the desk.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, I guess I was given a briefing book.

Q: In that process I mean you're not wandering around Washington yourself, doesn't H take you up there and help you with introductions? I mean you don't just stagger into Senator Dole's office, have you heard I've been nominated?

LAMBERTSON: Well, I did stagger into Dole's office, being a constituent of his. I had a couple of good meetings with him in his fancy majority leader's office in the Capitol Building. I took the initiative to see Nancy Kassebaum, too. But we had a good congressional relations man working for EAP, Chuck Morris, who was very helpful to me.

Q: They might have introduced you to a couple of offices and might have suggested well, this office is Senator so and so and he is going to ask you, I know they're interested in this, so there's some preparation, you're just not waiting.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, it doesn't have to be as much as for a guy off the street. I prepped for it. I wanted to make it good.

Q: You were saying though you got caught up in this wonderful experience where a senator holds up your appointment?

LAMBERTSON: That's right. Moynihan held it up. He held it up because he was critical of American policy toward Burma, and Burma had been part of my DAS portfolio. There had been an election in Burma in 1988 and the Burmese military ignored the results as you might remember. Aung San Su Ki's situation was already of concern. Moynihan said we ought to be tougher on the Burmese. We ought to tighten our sanctions. Moynihan was personally focused on Burma because he had a staff member, married to a Burmese woman, who was really a kind of Burma activist. I heard from him when I was in Thailand also. In any event a hold was placed on the nomination and Ken Quinn, who replaced me as DAS, had to deal with that issue. Finally, the Department tweaked the sanctions that we had placed on Burma and added a new provision to them having to do with textiles or lumber exports or something of that nature. That was sufficient and Moynihan allowed the confirmation vote.

Q: Were you the only one held up? Sometimes there're classes of people.

LAMBERTSON: No, I was the only one held up.

Q: So, everyone else who was nominated...

LAMBERTSON: My nomination was the closest thing to something Burma-related, I suppose, on the docket, so I was the logical hostage.

Q: I think Don Gregg mentioned that his whole class was held up.

LAMBERTSON: This was just me.

Q: Aren't you lucky?

LAMBERTSON: Yes. It was kind of irritating. It would have been very irritating if it had gone on for much longer, but I didn't have a need to leave for Bangkok before the end of the summer anyway so it wasn't a problem.

Q: Was there an overlap between you and Dan O'Donohue?

LAMBERTSON: No. There's never an overlap is there? I've never known of an overlap. The old guy's got to get out and the new guy's got to come in and present his credentials. There has to be a gap, it wouldn't be seemly otherwise. So, Dan left sometime during the summer as I recall.

Q: I have down in my notes that you presented your credentials on the 24th of September, 1991.

LAMBERTSON: I guess that's right.

Q: This is Thailand, a monarchy, that must have been a very interesting ceremony.

LAMBERTSON: It was very interesting. Sacie and I had just arrived. I had gotten there in advance of Sacie as a matter of fact. We were staying in the guesthouse because the residence was still being repainted. Sacie brought with her a rented morning coat outfit from the States. It did not fit. It required safety pins here and there to tuck it in and make it look decent. So, we did that.

In Thailand credentials are presented to the king at his palace - Chitlada Palace, an unassuming, Victorian-looking building, a long distance from the Grand Palace. The Thai send a car to pick you up to take you there. It's not a carriage, but an old yellow Mercedes, one of the king's Mercedes. So I rode over there, with an escort from the palace, went into the palace, waited a few minutes in a foyer downstairs and then was told that all was in readiness. While I was waiting I was briefed on what to do: you walk into this rather long narrow room, the king is standing at the far end of it, you make a sharp left turn and walk toward him and stop six feet away from him. He greeted me and I greeted him. I read my speech, and he read his speech. We shook hands, as I presented him my credentials. We conversed for a few minutes and then I took my leave which entailed backing up while still facing him for at least a number of paces and then turning around and walking out. There were only one or two other people in the room. Very simple. Very dignified.

Q: Now the king has been king since the war.

LAMBERTSON: Since 1948. He's the world's longest serving monarch. Just ahead of Queen Elizabeth. He's also the only king ever to have been born in the United States, in Boston while his father was studying at Harvard Medical School. He's a very interesting man and I came to admire him a great deal. I think he played and is still playing a very constructive and important role in Thailand.

Q: Many of us who have dealt with Thai issues have always been very impressed with the king's deft touch and ability to be a mediator from time to time when their society has needed it.

LAMBERTSON: That was dramatically in evidence in May of 1992 when the king stepped in just in time to prevent what could have been an even greater loss of life than had already occurred.

Q: Before we get there, could you give us a description of the embassy? When I was there in the early '70s, I think we were told we were the second or third largest embassy, because you had the regional couriers and the regional this and that, because it was a major transportation center, etc.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, and it was still big when I got there in 1991. I was looking at an Inspector's report from my time there and according to the Inspectors, the total number of people was something like 1,80600-some Americans, 1,200 and some Thai, not counting contractor personnel, and not counting Peace Corps volunteers of which we still had almost 200. It was a very big mission. It still reflected a kind of Cold War configuration to some extent. Our intelligence presence was large. JUSMAG seemed awfully big to me. Then there were a great many other offices and agencies there, including, as you said, a number of regional operations, because Bangkok was and still is today something of a transportation hub. And it's also a relatively low cost place to have skilled people working on your finances or what have you - the regional finance center was particularly impressive I thought. I believe I once counted 26 separate government agencies represented in Thailand, and the Inspector's report that I mentioned identified 35 or so "operating units." I'm not sure what that meant, but it was a very large embassy. It got slightly smaller during my time there.

Q: How many consulates did we have at that time?

LAMBERTSON: We had three. Songkhla, Udorn and Chiang Mai. During the time that I was there we closed Udorn and Songkhla. I certainly hope we don't ever close Chiang Mai.

Q: At the embassy's initiative or Washington's initiative?

LAMBERTSON: It was mutual. Washington wanted to do it and I couldn't justify standing in front of the train. I regretted having to do it. As I mentioned to you before, I like constituent posts and I think there ought to be other ways to save money rather than to close constituent posts if at all possible.

Q: That was Washington's interest, to save money?

LAMBERTSON: Yes.

Q: They closed my post.

LAMBERTSON: Your post? Yes.

Q: We were talking about what the embassy looked like when you first arrived. You're saying it still is a very substantial mission.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, indeed. It was very big, many different agencies represented. It was clearly going to be an interesting managerial challenge in addition to the other aspects of the job.

Q: Now, Vic Tomseth was your DCM? He'd been there through Dan so he's pretty solid?

LAMBERTSON: He's an experienced Thai language officer and it was valuable for me to have him there, coming in brand new to the country except for occasional visits. Vic was a very solid officer, very good judgment about the Thai and good insights into the culture, so I was very lucky to have him. The political counselor was Skip Boyce who had been there about three years at that time. Skip I had known slightly back in the Department. He had worked for the Undersecretary for Security Assistance. I think "T" was the acronym. He and Bob Baurlein. Boyce and Baurlein or Baurlein and Boyce had carved out an influential role for themselves in security assistance matters within the Department. I knew him to be an accomplished bureaucrat. He was also a good political counselor. He was extremely enthusiastic about Thailand. He had in three years of self-study gotten quite fluent in Thai, and so he was a strong member of the team. I had a good economic counselor as well, John Medeiros. Smart, very knowledgeable on all the issues. In general I thought the people there were good. We had some excellent junior officers, too.

Q: You were commenting that the structure of the embassy reminded, still had aspects of the Cold War and the wawe'd organized ourselves during the Cold War and yet by this time ASEAN is an important factor, the Thai relationships with their neighbors, it's less of a bilateral, I don't want to say less of a bilateral relationship that the Thai had, but there's more going on in Southeast Asia now and more for us to begin to watch I would suspect.

LAMBERTSON: I agree. It was a very different Southeast Asia than when JUSMAG was established, for example, and we were fighting a war in Indochina and the Thai were fighting with us in Laos, and there was a bilateral military relationship with real teeth to it. Now we had only a vestige of that kind of relationship, although a valuable one. I must say, those war years in some respects set the tone of the whole relationship, and established a foundation we were still building on, so to speak. Many of the Thai leaders, many of the military leaders who had become prime ministers, had cut their teeth on the U.S.-Thai military relationship many years before during the Indochina wars. We had personal relationships with many members of the government that dated from those years and yet, yes, in 1991 Southeast Asia was a very different place. One of the newly important aspects of the relationship that we would have to pay much more attention to in the years to come was bilateral economic relations. The Thai were beginning to be a genuinely significant trading partner and U.S. investment was building to impressive levels. Those kinds of issues were bound to become more important in the overall mix.

Q: In fact that would be underlined by the fact that American investors weren't the only ones there. The Japanese had a high presence and I suspect the Europeans would, too. It's probably a pretty competitive environment.

LAMBERTSON: On the economic side it was quite competitive. The Japanese in fact were dominant players in the Thai economy. This had begun as a result of the movement offshore of Japanese manufacturing through the '80s, and they had found Thailand a particularly congenial place to relocate. There were hundreds of substantial Japanese manufacturing operations in Thailand. The Japanese also continued to give huge amounts of low interest loans in their quasi-aid program, so the combination of official flows of money and this massive flow of private investment made the Japanese big players in Thailand. Bigger than we were. The Europeans were also quite active.

Q: In addition to the businessmen's interest out there, the USG was beginning at this time to be very interested in intellectual property rights. I remember I was in Beijing at this time and we were pressing the Chinese on this. An interesting conversation in which the guys, our counterparts basically said, this is fine, we'll go along with it, but you don't get anything more than Taiwan gave you. In fact I think you said that most of your calls on government officials had to deal with economic issues.

LAMBERTSON: No, a majority of my calls on government officials on economic matters probably had to do with some aspect of intellectual property rights, either copyright issues or pharmaceutical patent issues. In both cases, of course, our emphasis on those issues reflected pressures from industry associations in the United States - the Motion Picture Association and the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association. But they had legitimate reasons to be concerned about what was going on in Thailand. There was a tremendous amount of piracy, of computer software, for example. Experts in the United States estimated that the pirated share of software sold in Thailand was probably above 90%. It was very high elsewhere as well. You could find figures that high even in places in Europe, and certainly other places in Asia. Even in the United States a surprisingly high percentage of software, then at least, was considered to be pirated. We had that issue to deal with, and certainly there were pirated editions of every new American film easily available on the streets of Bangkok shortly after release in the United States. We spent a lot of time trying to get that situation improved and we made some progress, but I'm sure it's an issue on the agenda for the American Embassy in Bangkok today.

Q: It raises an interesting question, to be successful, doesn't the other government have to have enforcement mechanisms and laws and all that?

LAMBERTSON: It has to have enforcement mechanisms and laws. But IPR protection is going to continue to be a problem until the country in question begins to develop its own intellectual property that it wants to protect. Then you see a change in the culture. I think that has happened in a number of developing countries. I think in Thailand it is beginning to happen. There's a change in mindset that comes with growing affluence which I guess makes it easier for people to afford the copyrighted versions of stuff, but also, as an economy develops, it begins to develop its own areas of expertise and its government leaders begin to see the logic of intellectual property rights as property, as something that should be protected. And then with that come more effective enforcement mechanisms. It's kind of a maturation process as economies develop. I doubt that you can rush it much, frankly.

Q: There's a probably an AMCHAM (American Chamber of Commerce)?

LAMBERTSON: Oh, indeed, a big, very active AMCHAM. I remember my first meeting with the AMCHAM board. It wasn't entirely successful because the AMCHAM had been, and remained throughout my time there, vigorous advocates of opening up trade with Vietnam. There was still a trade embargo on. I wasn't terribly sympathetic with them in that first meeting. I said that in my view there were two more important issues that had to be resolved before we got around to opening up trade with Vietnam, those being POW/MIA accounting and the situation in Cambodia. Nevertheless, I had good relations with the AMCHAM and I think they saw me as a friend and a pretty effective advocate for their interests. I certainly spent a lot of time, and we as an embassy put a lot of effort into business-related issues, that is to say, insuring that the playing field for American companies was level or even tilted in our direction. We had some nice little victories in that area, American companies getting contracts that they would not otherwise have gotten had it not been for our intervention.

Q: That intervention itself isn't, "hey, you have to do this for us. We have a great company here that's quite capable of handling this project you've got going."

LAMBERTSON: Right. You try to always do your advocacy on a high moral plane, but nevertheless, you're making a pitch for your company against what is probably an equally good foreign competitor who might have better financing. The financing package always seemed to be a key issue.

Q: It's true that you have multiple interests and you're saying, okay, half of my time was on commercial issues, but you're touching bases with the Thai on various kinds of issues. Cambodia, all kinds of other issues and I would suspect that part of your presentation is let's not mix the conflict over there with this enormous opportunity for cooperation over here and try to keep things from bleeding one to the other.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, absolutely. We often had rather contentious talks with the Thai on economic issues and generally we wanted to keep those isolated from other parts of the relationship. I felt I was very lucky to be serving in Thailand as opposed to some of the other ASEAN countries because I had such a very rich menu of issues to deal with. The war in Cambodia - a settlement had just been reached or was being reached by the time I got there - but still there was a tremendous number of Cambodia-related problems to deal with. Refugees on the Burma side. Internal politics. A very active military-to-military relationship. Drug trafficking. A lot to get your teeth into. You know, shortly after I got there, in the spring of '92, I went on the very first "ASEAN ambassadors tour" of the United States. That meant U.S. ambassadors to ASEAN going back to the United States, traveling around the country, touting Southeast Asia as a great place for American companies to do business. This was prior to the financial meltdown of '97 and '98 and there seemed to be unrelieved good news out there on the horizon and we were all enthusiastic proponents.

Q: This was a private thing?

LAMBERTSON: It was sponsored by the U.S.-ASEAN Council, yes, so they paid the bill. It was something that was advocated very strongly by Paul Cleveland, who was then in Malaysia, and Bob Orr, the former governor of Indiana who was the ambassador in Singapore - a very good one and a very thoughtful and innovative and interesting man. I think it was his idea perhaps first, and then Paul seconded it and eventually it was done. We went to five or six places on that first tour. The group included myself, Paul Cleveland, Robert Orr, Frank Wisner in the Philippines and John Monjo in Indonesia.

In our first group presentation, which was in Portland, actually on the Nike campus near Portland, Paul Cleveland said that he spent 50% of his time dealing with economic and business issues, and John Monjo claimed an even higher percentage. Bob Orr could have as well. All of them, I concluded, had less varied portfolios than mine was at that time. Indonesia was in a stable period, politically. The New Order was not yet shaken, and in fact John was able to spend and needed to spend a great deal of time on economic and business-related matters. The same was certainly true in Malaysia and Singapore. Less true in the Philippines, and I don't think Frank Wisner claimed any kind of percentage like that and I certainly did not. I thought of that often, that trip with my ambassadorial colleagues. I was sure I had the best job of the bunch.

Q: A minute ago you gave an exciting list of things that you dealt with. Let's work on that list. Refugees.

LAMBERTSON: When I got there we still had a huge number of Cambodian displaced persons in three major camps along the Thai-Cambodia border. The war was winding down and yet the reality was the refugees, displaced persons, were still there and the resettlement process was yet to begin and we were very actively working with the UN, including Sergio Vieira de Mello, the man killed in Baghdad. He was one of the first UN people on the scene as the UN solution for Cambodia began to be implemented. Repatriation of the Cambodian displaced persons was a major project in which our embassy, and the refugee office especially, was very much involved. We still had many thousands of Hmong refugees at the Ban Vinai camp on the Mekong River and their onward journey to the United States was pretty much assured, but they were still our responsibility. There were some sizeable clusters of refugees along the Thai-Burma border. There the issue was the occasional Thai effort to push them back into Burma, which we always vigorously opposed. We kept a close watch on what was happening along the Thai-Burma border to make sure the Thai were treating these people properly.

Q: You tend to find that countries of first asylum don't appreciate the honor.

LAMBERTSON: Yes. And over the years the Thai had a very good record. They have given asylum to many thousands of refugees from many different directions.

Q: I would assume since the refugee issue has been with Thailand since the fall of Saigon that things are pretty well organized. The UN is there. All these NGOs. The camps are not ad hoc at all.

LAMBERTSON: No, the system was in place and it was working.

Q: Was the refugee section very large at that time?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, it was pretty large. I don't know how it compared to your days. I don't know the numbers. It was certainly a sizeable group of FSOs, both in the Orderly Departure Program and the, what was the other one called? RARefugee Assistance Unit.

Q: Yes, I was just trying to think of that. Orderly departure was still ongoing? Isn't that the one where they went to Vietnam and they would make regular trips to?

LAMBERTSON: Yes. To Saigon.

Q: I think that started in '86 or '87ish period to sort of try to cut down of people coming out and the danger then of first asylum issues that came with that, we cut a deal.

LAMBERTSON: A system that would enable them to leave in an orderly fashion. Yes, and I was always very impressed with that program. It was, in effect, the Saigon Consulate General-in-waiting.

Q: There was a contractor attached to the refugee section when I was there in '87 who did the interviewing for potential asylum cases to the U.S. and I can't think of who that was..

LAMBERTSON: The company you mean? The contracting organization?

Q: Yes, I don't even remember the company because it had been there for so long, we always knew it by the names of the guys.

LAMBERTSON: I can't remember the name.

Q: Because they would have been in a building up Sathorn Road at that time in '87.

LAMBERTSON: Yes. That's right. You're absolutely right. That was a big operation.

Q: Yes, okay, so they're still there.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, it was a big operation, and that would have accounted for many of the large number of contractor personnel I was referring to in that Inspectors report. They were these refugee interviewers. I'd forgotten about that.

Q: That distracts me for a moment because when I left in '87 there was some new construction going on. When I was in Bangkok in '75 we had individual houses we were in. I was actually [out of the area] and then when I came back in '85 people were in apartments and something was going to be done across the street. Was any of that in place? A physical readjustment of the mission I guess.

LAMBERTSON: What was ultimately done was that the new embassy was built there.

Q: On your watch?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, construction was initiated on my watch. I have somewhere back in the basement the chrome plated spade with which the first dirt was turned. It's a big, ugly building and I had nothing to do with the design. Plans were totally in place, and construction was about ready to start when I got there. We used to have a medical office, a medical unit over there, and some townhouses if you remember.

Sacie and I did manage to affect the project in two ways, as I remember. We insisted that footings for the massive perimeter wall be "bridged" over major tree roots, so that some of those lovely old trees could survive. And at the Dutch Ambassador's request, the monolithic wall between his property and ours was scrapped in favor of a reasonably attractive iron fence.

The embassy staff must be virtually 100% in apartment buildings by now; it was almost that way even then, when I was there. Traffic was a terrible problem. There weren't very many people who lived within walking distance. The quality of life undoubtedly declined considerably between your first tour and your second, certainly it had by the time I got there.

To get back to Cambodia. The refugee business was an active one, to be sure. The Cambodia settlement included an initial focus on the repatriation of displaced persons to Cambodia. I might add that was an interesting time, because the UN deployed into Cambodia in considerable part through Thailand and we were also establishing an embassy in Phnom Penh during that period. More or less at the same time. Charlie Twining went in as our first ambassador. That was a well deserved appointment. Charlie was a long-time observer of the Cambodia scene; he was one of the first to figure out what was happening in that country immediately after the KR takeover in 1975. I think Charlie suspected that we looked upon his new embassy as just another constituent post of Bangkok. There were sensitivities that I had to be aware of, but in fact we tried to be helpful to Charlie and his people in using our large administrative infrastructure to help him get started.

Our refugee people and some of our other people were directly helpful to the UN operation as well. Bangkok was not the only avenue of ingress for them, some obviously went directly to Phnom Penh, but for things happening along the border, the logical place for the UN to muster and get organized was in Thailand. I remember driving along the Thai-Cambodia border one time with an officer from the refugee section and we passed convoys of Dutch armored vehicles. They were painted UN white, but it was a Dutch unit in Thailand moving by land across the border to the vicinity of Pailin. Thailand was very much a staging base for the UN, and our embassy was quite involved in some of that as well.

Q: Your view of the Cambodian situation as Deputy Assistant Secretary is high policy content, now you're ambassador to Thailand and there are some hands-on things. I mean, you're talking to some of the Cambodian personalities I assume.

LAMBERTSON: I'd met most of them when I was DAS. And in those early months of my time in Bangkok they came through every now and then. When they did I often saw them, particularly Son Sann of the KPNLF and Prince Ranariddh once or twice. That all tailed off as Cambodia became more "normal" and the UNTAC got established and working, as did our embassy. But there was always the issue to deal with of Thai policy and Thai actions along the border, Thai army complicity with the Khmer Rouge - which UNTAC was very quick to identify and point to, sometimes falsely. We had those kinds of issues during that first year. The UNTAC people would say that the Thai were doing something nefarious with the KR down there along the border, and Charlie's sources would say the same thing and I would need to react to it and I would. We would investigate the situation and try to get our own reading of what was going on and then make the necessary representations to the Thai, because sometimes they in fact were doing something they shouldn't have been doing. But fairly often UNTAC's [United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia] info was wrong, and the Thai role was not as negative as everybody in Phnom Penh thought it was.

Q: But obviously we were interested in the Thai role and did we organize ourselves to have an officer in the political section, perhaps, that sort of had that portfolio and he would do traveling from time to time?

LAMBERTSON: As I recall we did. We had the office in Aranyaprathet as well, for a long time. We had the refugee people moving around along the border, and I'm sure we did have somebody in the political section whose main responsibility was Cambodia-watching. But we had a variety of people, from several agencies, out there on the border, and if an issue came up we focused on it, tried to ascertain what the truth was, and then we weren't shy in talking to the Thai about it. The Thai role was often questionable; it was also often not quite as unhelpful or negative as it was perceived to be by both UNTAC and our embassy in Phnom Penh.

Q: Actually how did the Thai organize for the Cambodian situation? Was the army in charge and the ministry of foreign affairs out of the picture? Who were the main characters?

LAMBERTSON: The army was certainly in charge. The foreign ministry was quite involved, though, in the political settlement and in the administration of the UNTAC program. I remember one thing we did, Asa Sarasin, foreign minister under the Anand government, invited the diplomatic corps to go into Cambodia just to have a look-see at the initial relocation efforts of UNTAC. So, the diplomatic corps from Bangkok was flown over to the border, loaded onto fancy buses and driven into Cambodia by the Thai foreign minister. I'm sure that was not terribly appreciated by the Cambodians, but there wasn't a Cambodian government yet. UNTAC was in charge of the place. We went across the border, to the first major town down the road from Aranyaprathet, I can't remember the name of it. We visited there with the Japanese woman who was the head of UNHCR, Mrs. Ogata, and with Sergio Vieira de Mello, among others, and looked at the operation that was already underway to resettle people coming back across the border. The foreign ministry was always involved, but in terms of security issues and what really happened on the ground, the military was in charge and the military was responsible, including for any misdeeds.

Q: Because the key mission of the embassy is to figure out what actor in the host country is doing the policy making...

LAMBERTSON: Right. There was no doubt that the army was number one where Cambodia was concerned.

Q: There's a long history of concern with Thailand and the narcotics issue. You surely saw this as DAS. It was a big thing when I was there as late as '87. How does the narcotics issue come to you during your ambassadorship?

LAMBERTSON: By the time I arrived in Thailand, production of opium poppies within Thailand was a pretty minor part of the problem. Various eradication campaigns and crop substitution schemes and other programs had eliminated most of the significant poppy production within Thailand. A couple of times I went out with the Thai police on highly publicized opium eradication forays and I always enjoyed it. We went by helicopter up into the mountains of the North, landed on mountain ridges and trekked down to the open fields and whacked at poppies while television cameras rolled.

Of course, Thailand remained a major trafficking route for opium production across the border in Burma, to some extent in Laos, but primarily Burma. In particular, those areas of Burma controlled by the Shan United Army and the Wa. They were still doing quite well and we tried various means of disrupting their trafficking operations, and even their actual production. We kept picking at the problem, and devoting considerable resources to it. DEA was a large office in the embassy, and in Chiang Mai. The CIA also contributed to the effort, but there was that now famous "wall" between the CIA and the Justice Department. There was a limited amount that the CIA could do to provide operational intelligence to DEA. Nevertheless, we had a few little victories. There was a series of well coordinated Thai army and police raids against villages along the Thai-Burma border early one Sunday morning that netted some serious, high ranking traffickers along with some of their booty. It probably at least temporarily disrupted trafficking arrangements along the border. We also orchestrated, with the involvement of a number of agencies, a ruse that drew back to Bangkok from, I believe Kuala Lumpur, a very high ranking Sino-Thai trafficker. He was wanted in the United States. He was sufficiently high-ranking that when we nabbed him at the Bangkok airport he was taken across the tarmac, put on an air force plane and flown to New York where he appeared before the Brooklyn Grand Jury. He was said to be the highest ranking Southeast Asian trafficking figure ever "rendered" to justice in the United States. So from time to time we made a small impact on the thriving drug trafficking business, but I'm sure it's still going strong.

Q: The drug situation also comes to the embassy in a slightly different direction when Americans get involved, young tourists or something like that. Did your consular section keep busy visiting people in jail?

LAMBERTSON: Indeed they did. There were some tragic situations, particularly involving young American women of very modest means who had been sweet-talked by some guy into going to Thailand and bringing back a suitcase with something in it. They were going to do maybe 25 years in jail in Bangkok as a result, and there was not much we could do to shorten their sentences. We certainly, the consular section, kept track of them, kept in touch with them, made sure that their treatment was no worse than anybody else's in those Thai jails, but there was not much we could do to affect their sentences. There would be an occasional royal amnesty as I recall, around the King's birthday, and sometimes a few Americans benefited from that.

Q: It's a consistent problem.

LAMBERTSON: It was a widespread problem, and I think generally anybody caught in that net was simply caught.

Q: How major was that problem? I've heard other posts, the women at posts having to organize ways to feed,...that the prison population is so large that it's a sort of community.

LAMBERTSON: I don't recall, although there may have been community efforts that I wasn't aware of on behalf of the prisoners. I'm sure the number of young Americans incarcerated was way up in double digits.

Q: One of the main functions of course of the embassy overseas is to watch the host country politics. Who's on top, who's in charge. You were there at a particularly volatile time as I recall.

LAMBERTSON: Yes. When I got there the Anand government had been in office a number of months. There had been a coup against the previous prime minister less than a year earlier, and, at our urging and that of other friends of Thailand, the perpetrators of that coup chose a respected civilian prime minister, Anand Panyarachun, and allowed him to name his own cabinet, and it was a cabinet of technocrats. In terms of talent and integrity, it was probably one of the best governments Thailand ever had. That government's mandate was to prepare the way for an election the following year.

So in the spring of 1992 an election was held, I believe in March (while I was in the United States on that ambassadors' tour). The conservative, traditionalist parties collectively won a majority of the seats and their first choice as Prime Minister was Narong Wongwan, an upcountry politician, long and unfavorably known to the United States. We were quite sure he was a drug trafficker. I'd seen the evidence and did not doubt that he was guilty. In naming him as a trafficker, we basically made it impossible for him to be prime minister. This was highly publicized in the United States. The State Department spokesman noted that if Narong were appointed prime minister, he wouldn't be able to travel to the United States, so that would have been something of a handicap for him. In any event the coalition dropped him and named General Suchinda - the head of the army and one of the men behind the coup the previous year - as the new prime minister. This sparked widespread opposition in Thailand. It wasn't just young people protesting the military having in effect extended themselves in power. It was an impressively middle class democratic uprising, such as had not happened for a long time, if ever.

Q: Actually, so what forces are boiling up in Thailand at this time? Who are the main actors?

LAMBERTSON: A middle class in Thailand emerged as the economy had developed. People who were educated and who had sufficient economic security that they could begin to worry about things like politics. They were intensely interested. They had a more modern outlook, perhaps one could say, and believed that Thailand should no longer simply be ruled by a succession of military figures. At least that's what appeared to be happening. A "civil society" had developed over the previous, say 20 years. It wasn't necessarily represented in the political parties, but there were and are in Thailand some fairly effective non-party organizations - associations of women, and associations of farmers, and in particular in Bangkok, an affluent slice of society that had matured to some extent - to the point that military coups and military government were no longer acceptable to it. So, when Suchinda was seen as turning back the clock once again, a lot of people in Bangkok - it was primarily a Bangkok phenomenon - were ready to hit the street. That's what happened in April and May of that year.

Q: So, those were very serious demands that the prime minister resign?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, indeed. As street demonstrations mounted, the army was called in to preserve order and there were confrontations between demonstrators and soldiers. There were ugly scenes of people being beaten with rifle butts and this inflamed passions all the more within the so-called "democracy movement" and tensions rose quickly. Things really came to a head in one night's confrontation near the Democracy Monument when the army fired on demonstrators and killed many of theperhaps one hundred. It was the bloodiest night in Thai political history, at least since the early '70s. And it was an evolving situation in which we, the United States, had an opinion and an interest. We didn't like the idea of Suchinda naming himself prime minister. We didn't like the idea of the army moving in in a ham-handed way. We were hoping that Thai politics would continue to evolve in a democratic direction. So we had things to say on the subject.

Q: To whom were we saying them?

LAMBERTSON: We were talking to just about anybody I could get an appointment with. I made the rounds. I saw all the major players, including Major General Chamlong, a former mayor of Bangkok and a very unmilitary military man who was the leader of the pro-democracy movement. I had him around for lunch at the residence. We had a good talk and I think I left him in no doubt that we supported his aims, but that we hoped unnecessary confrontations could be avoided, and a peaceful solution found. I took that same general line with other politicians.

I saw various military leaders and made pointed representations about avoiding the use of force in dealing with these demonstrations. I don't remember exactly when I finally got my appointment with Suchinda; I believe it was just after the army disgraced itself on Democracy Boulevard, and I made a strong pitch to him.

I wanted to stay ahead of the curve. With the help of Vic and Skip Boyce, I tried to anticipate both what was happening in Bangkok and what was likely being thought about it in Washington. I wanted to keep the initiative and not simply have to react to a series of instructions from the Department. By and large I did that. We tried to think of things to do to ameliorate the situation and move it along in a positive direction, before the Department thought of the same things and told me to do them. I preferred retaining the lead. There was never any particular point of disagreement with the Department or with anybody in Washington about what needed to be done in the large sense. The discussion was about tactics more than strategy.

We had the Cobra Gold exercise going on at that very time. We had lots of soldiers in country, and I pulled the plug on that exercise. They were redeployed very smoothly and without objection from anybody on the military side.

Q: To close it down a little more quickly?

LAMBERTSON: To close it down right then and get them out, yes.

Q: Okay, actually that's something that generally takes place far to the South.

LAMBERTSON: It varied from year to year. One year it's "sea oriented" and there are marines involved and sometimes a landing, and the next year it will be more army and it will be further inland, with less navy involvement. The nature of it changes from year to year.

Q: But it's not that they were in the backyard?

LAMBERTSON: No, they weren't in the backyard. Nevertheless, it was unseemly for U.S. forces to be exercising with the Thai army at a time when the Thai army was certainly not distinguishing itself on the streets of Bangkok. I thought it was better to break it off, and so we made that recommendation from Bangkok and it was quickly acted upon, and there was no dissent from Honolulu or anywhere else. It was actually more than a recommendation; it was a decision.

Q: Because you had seen this process unfold in Manila in one sense, opposition to an elected government and the political stability collapsed. Now you can't have F-4s flying over, but you are trying to touch bases with the main actors and to tell them...

LAMBERTSON: Among other things, I was very interested in what the King might be thinking of doing. I didn't seek an appointment with the King. I did contact his senior advisors, however, to try to have some indication of what the King might be preparing to do. They were noncommittal. It turned out that the King proved to be very much on top of things and at the crucial moment did intervene. The crisis was resolved when the King invited Suchinda and General Chamlong to come to the palace for an audience, which was televised live. General Suchinda and General Chamlong approached His Majesty on their knees, the King declared that the situation had gone on long enough and was displeasing him, and it essentially ended right there.

There were no further demonstrations, no further confrontations between the army and civilians, and within a few days Suchinda stepped down and Anand was appointed yet again to run another government to prepare another election. I was quick to make contact with Anand, to get his views on what was going on and his thoughts on what we could do to help. I told Anand that we would certainly support him in any way we could in the delicate effort to remove the army leaders most directly responsible for the bloodshed. This wasn't necessarily an easy thing for an interim civilian prime minister to do. But he managed it. They retreated to the golf courses around Bangkok and never again had any kind of political role. Anand was good. He did a great job of reestablishing his authority, and he knew that he could count on our support. I think our embassy, and our government, played its cards pretty well during that whole three month period. We ended up earning a good deal of credit in Thai eyes for having been on the right side of the situation.

I might add that during this period I kept in close touch with the British Ambassador, Christian Adams, a fine man and a good friend. We compared notes and at times tried to coordinate what we said and who we said it to.

Q: One of the pressures that you were under, one of the instructions from Washington had to do with the fact that congress had stepped into the issue of military coups taking over governments and this automatically cut military aid. Was that law of any help to you?

LAMBERTSON: That had been in effect since the coup against Chatchai the previous year, and military assistance didn't amount to much in Thailand by 1991 anyway. It was an affluent place and we were selling them stuff, but we were also giving them good financing terms so those credit terms were affected, as you know having been in that business. It was nevertheless an important political symbol - cutting off "military aid." It meant something in Thailand and in that sense it was useful and the restoration of it also was a useful potential carrot. We urged that it be turned back on again as soon as it could be, which was done. I think that law generally has a positive effect. It probably takes the pressure off embassies sometimes, because of its automatic aspect.

Q: This is a very pressured time for you and the political section. How did you organize yourself?

LAMBERTSON: This was a good example of Foreign Service officers stepping up to the task and performing very, very well. There was some danger in going out on the street and seeing what was happening and reporting on it. As I remember, we had more volunteers than we really could use for the job. The political section had junior officers from other parts of the mission stepping forward and saying, can I help? Let us have a role in this. People were extremely interested and attracted to the notion of being in on the situation. Officers of other agencies were equally interested in being involved.

I would meet with Vic and SkiDCM and Pol Counselor - and a few others, each morning and I suppose several times during the day, to compare notes and talk about how to proceed. I especially appreciated Vic and Skip and their experience and good judgment. Other sections were also involveconsular, with its U.S. citizen protective responsibilities, the Defense Attachï¿½, given the nature of the ongoing confrontation, USIS certainly, and no doubt others. We would decide early in the day on reporting or analytical objectives. Skip, I think, made the specific "beat" assignments, with Vic undoubtedly also involved. I think we produced an excellent product, too. This was more than a dozen years ago, and I don't have any reporting cables squirreled away, but I know at the time I was satisfied that we were doing a very good job of staying on top of a rapidly changing and dangerous situatioand I was a good judge of that.

Q: This is not 9:00 to 5:00?

LAMBERTSON: No.

Q: The crack of dawn to?

LAMBERTSON: Until late at night and it was potentially hazardous as you got over there in the Democracy Boulevard neighborhood.

Q: It was important to get the story back to Washington. In the olden days you had communicators who typed up and encrypted the cables. How is this embassy connected to Washington now?

LAMBERTSON: Well, word processors. There was an e-mail connection by then, unclassified e-mail. But classified stuff still went to the code room. They weren't using IBM Selectrics anymore. It didn't have to be printed out and taken there physically...

Q: ...which speeds it up. One of your objectives is to keep in advance of advice from Washington and this sounds like this was.

LAMBERTSON: We drafted press guidance every day; we wanted to get our version of how it ought to be said back there. Generally our version was used, perhaps added to or modified somewhat. And we did an awful lot of situation reporting and a fair amount of analytical stuff.

Q: I would suspect that knowing "how Washington works" you probably would have put your finger on the USIA guy and say, look, I want.

LAMBERTSON: We had a good USIA gal at that point, Donna Oglesby. She could write. She was quick. We did try to feed the Washington maw. Keep them happy back there. And also, as I said, try to keep the initiative in terms of what we wanted to do about the situation. I think it worked out very well. As I said, we were widely seen in Thailand as having been on the side of the angels and that helped us in subsequent months and years. The election then took place in the summer of 1992, and produced the Chuan Leekpai government, with which I enjoyed working. I thought Chuan and his people were an awfully good group. They weren't any more talented individually than the Anand government, across the board, but they had the virtue of being elected. They tended to be rather youthful.

Q: This is the Democratic Party?

LAMBERTSON: Democratic Party of Thailand.

Q: It had been in being since the '70s.

LAMBERTSON: Yes. It was more of a real party in the western sense than most of its competitors. I was fortunate to be able during most of my tour to work either with Prime Minister Anand or Prime Minister Chuan and his cabinet.

Q: Chuan is an elected democratic politician from the Southern part of Thailand. He's a sophisticated practitioner of Thai politics all these years. He returns to parliament after the October '73 disposition of Thanom-Praphat, so here is a very sophisticated Thai political operator I would assume. I mean he doesn't represent the military. He represents in fact what the military used to hate. The military used to say they would never ever let the Democratic Party come to power and now it has. That must have been very frightening to the military.

LAMBERTSON: I suppose to some. But the new army leadership, in particular the new commander, General Wimon, genuinely accepted the changed situatiowithout that, the new civilian government wouldn't have had a chance to succeed.

Q: The Thai are operating a parliamentary system so the Democratic Party has won the majority or...?

LAMBERTSON: No, Chuan was the leader of a coalition. I don't recall exactly what other parties were part of it, but the Democrats didn't have an absolute majority. I don't think any party had an absolute majority until Thaksin came along and produced his. Thaksin was just getting interested in politics during this period by the way.

Q: Do you recall your first meeting with the new Prime Minister Chuan?

LAMBERTSON: No, I don't. I'd met him previously and I don't remember what my first meeting might have been about or when it took place, but I always found him very comfortable to be around. He knew us, knew Vic Tomseth and Skip Boyce very well and was comfortable with them, and we had a good relationship with the leadership of that party.

Q: In fact over the years the embassy had been keeping up with opposition politicians and what not.

LAMBERTSON: Oh, yes.

Q: We were talking about working with the new civilian government under Prime Minister Chuan.

LAMBERTSON: I liked Chuan personally. You couldn't help but like his Foreign Minister, Surin Pitsuwan. He might have been a bit young for you to have known when you were in Thailand. He was educated in the United States, and for a time was a congressional intern in the office of Geraldine Ferraro. Thoroughly modern in his views, and a Muslim. I think he's bound to have an important role to play in Thailand in the future in some capacity, particularly given the current difficulties that they're having in the South.

Q: How were the rest of the offices in that government allocated, do you recall? Did they represent the parties? You were mentioning earlier that one of the interim governments was quite technocratic.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, other individuals in the Chuan government beyond Surin. The Finance Minister was outstanding, as was the Commerce Minister, Supachai, who later became head of the WTO. As a group, they were young, but talentethough no more than the Anand government had been.

Q: In fact Chuan was prime minister most of your tour.

LAMBERTSON: Yes he was. I think it was in the summer or spring perhaps of '95 that the next election took place and Chuan and the Democrats failed to retain that controlling plurality, and the new Prime Minister was Banharn Silpa-archa, a politician of the old stylan up-country politician. I don't remember much about his cabinet. I left shortly thereafter and eventually, a couple of years later, Chuan came back into office and fortunately for Thailand was in office during the financial crisis of the late '90s. I think the Thai handled that situation rather well.

Q: Earlier you had mentioned that we were concerned about drug connections with a potential prime minister. Did that issue re-arise then during the change from Chuan to Banharn?

LAMBERTSON: Only in a minor way-there was one potential cabinet member who had a less than stellar reputation.Somehow it became known that we were suspicious of his background and he sued for libel, me and the PAor rather he threatened to. But he was not appointed.

Q: You were mentioning earlier that one time Thailand and the United States were side by side during the Vietnam War, a very strong security relationship. In the post-Vietnam period what did the security relationship look like?

LAMBERTSON: It was then, and I think is to this day pretty solid. The Thai can always be counted on to give us over-flight rights and transit privileges when we're moving troops and equipment from the Pacific to the Middle East. We still have that military exercise relationship. I think the Thai are present in small numbers in Iraq right now. They can generally be counted upon to join us in some fashion in efforts that we think are important. One thing did come up while I was in Thailand in which we didn't get the answer we were looking for. I won't go into detail, but we proposed something to the Thai that would have been useful to us, strategically. We discussed it with both military and civilian sides of the government, and at some point I proposed it to the Prime Minister and talked to him more than once about it in the ensuing months. The Thai were reluctant to agree, believing it might be controversial within Thailand and perhaps within the region. But we kept working on it and I was cautiously optimistic that when push came to shove they would agree to it, and I so reported to Washington. Push came to shove during Prime Minister Chuan's visit to the United States later that year, in an Oval Office meeting. We eventually came around to that subject on the agenda and President Clinton noted that it had been under consideration for some time and he wondered if Chuan could give us an answer to our proposal. Chuan said that he could, and in his usual very soft-spoken way said that the answer had to be no. I having been pretty sure the Thai were going to say yes, would rather have been somewhere else at that particular moment. I really did misjudge that one. I think I did so for kind of classical reasons. I was too inclined to take what was in fact a noncommittal response as a possible positive. I tried to read too much into what I'd been told by Chuan and others. I simply misjudged the situation in a way that I shouldn't have after 30 years of Asian experience. So, it was a mistake. No lasting harm done, I suppose.

Q: Talking about how the local system works, I'm looking at a cartoon over here by the window. What is the background to that?

LAMBERTSON: It's me, and I have under my arm a list of namethe "black list." Chuan is smiling in the background. This was just after the episode in which it had been reported that one of Banharn's potential ministers was on that so-called "black list."

Q: Oh, okay.

LAMBERTSON: A pretty good profile I thought. USIS got me that original of it.

Q: Sometimes it's too easy to get into the local press.

LAMBERTSON: Right.

Q: But often, I remember when Ambassador Brown came in he did a parachute jump at the infantry training center, and everybody just thought that was awesome. That gave him face and entree unmatched in the late '80s. One of, actually looking at this cartoon, one of the old traditions, long term traditions in Bangkok is the foreign correspondents club and the invitations it extends to people to address the correspondent community as well as Thailand at large. How would you say was the embassy's projection of the American image in Thailand these days. I mean USIS is much smaller than it was. There are other trends going on. How does the embassy approach those issues?

LAMBERTSON: I think the ambassador is still in a position to make a big splash. I am sure it is true today that the American ambassador looms very large in Bangkok and if he wants to make a headline he can, unlike an ambassador of just about any other country. So, if you want to get their attention, you can do it via the press. That certainly was possible in my time there and I'm sure almost ten years later it still is.You can be a newsmaker in Bangkok. American ambassadors in a lot of places can be newsmakers - in most.

Q: Concerning your term in Thailand, Bangkok, were you honored with any presidential visits?

LAMBERTSON: No, I was not. I tried, but I just couldn't make it happen, either with George H. W. Bush or Bill Clinton. Clinton visited not too long after I left. We did have George Bush there a year after he left office and enjoyed him very much. He was an easy man to have around. He came out under the auspices of a couple of companies to make speeches and to be seen in their presence. I went with him to a couple of dinners and we had him to the house during his stay and invited the embassy staff. Virtually all the Americans came and many of the Thai, and Bush spoke to them and stood there for a very long time shaking hands with people. He was nice. I liked him then as I had ever since I first encountered him in that water polo game in Saigon in 1966 or so.

Q: Probably one of the more delicate aspects of the job of an American ambassador to Thailand is the interaction with the royal family. You presented your credentials under these very exquisite and protocol filled circumstances. The king plays a role in the political events later on. Care to make some other comments?

LAMBERTSON: I have great admiration for the King. He has played an important and positive role in Thailand's evolution over the last 50 years and more. One of the interesting initial aspects of my interaction with the royal family was the fact that my presentation of credentials took place earlier than it might have. The Foreign Ministry and royal household arranged the presentation promptly because they wanted me to be accredited prior to the visit to Bangkok of the Emperor of Japan, which came just a few days later. It was an interesting courtesy. That was our first experience of a State dinner in Bangkok and it was a magnificent spectacle. The Thai probably put on ceremonies more elegantly than just about any other people in the world. A State dinner at the Grand Palace in Thailand is really something to behold.

In any event, at the beginning of the evening, the diplomatic corps files through in protocol order and shakes hands with His Majesty and with the Emperor standing beside him - so Sacie and I have now shaken hands with two Japanese Emperors. Thereafter the diplomatic corps ends up at the other end of this very long room, and the King and the Emperor are still in their places and people are selected to go over and engage in conversation. The first person chosen was me, the most junior member of the diplomatic corps, and I was asked to cross the room and converse with their Majesties, the King and the Emperor. I did that, and I don't remember at all what we talked about. We talked for five minutes, mostly small talk I suppose. I thought it was most interesting and intriguing that I was the one chosen to do that. I got the same treatment at least one other time, during the visit of Vaclav Havel of the Czech Republic. Once again we'd all gone through the receiving line, and I was the one asked to go over and talk with the King and Havel. Being the American Ambassador in Bangkok is special.

I saw the King on such occasions. I saw him on various other ceremonial occasions when he presided. I came to feel that I knew him and that he knew me. I never called on him by myself. Maybe I should have, but I didn't. I saw him in the company of senior, important visitors from the United States, and then frequently on those various ceremonial occasions. I saw much more of the Queen. Sacie and I traveled with her to the United States twice, to Washington, to Boston, Baltimore, New York. She was entertained informally at the White House both times, once by President Bush at a lovely dinner in the family quarterat the end of which he left by helicopter from the lawn for a Middle East peace conference in Spaiand once by Hillary Clinton at a lunch. She's an outgoing woman. Sacie and I also traveled with her within Thailand, to the royal villas in the Northeast, in Chang Mai and in the South. We did three or four such trips. She enjoys those outings and they were fun to be a part of. There was always sumptuous food and spectacular table settings and a very warm atmosphere.

Sacie and I also got to know quite well Princess Sarandon, the eldest daughter, the Crown Princess. She's a very impressive woman, a student of many things. She is serious about her role and she tries to perform that role to the best of her ability all the time. I have a great respect for her and so do the Thai people. My own meetings with the Crown Prince were also quite pleasant. Then the other daughter in Thailand, Princess Chulabhorn is interesting, quite energetic despite frail health.

One of the most memorable evenings that Sacie and I had in Thailand was a going away dinner offered by the Queen for us at her villa near Ayutthaya. We were told that we would be guided there by a police escort and that we should wait at the residence. The police escort would swing by and lead us to the villa. We knew that it was going to be a late evening - both the King and the Queen are accustomed to late evenings, and undoubtedly very late risings in the morning. We sat there in formal clothes until about 10:00 PM when the police escort rolled in and we were off to Ayutthaya. We reached the villa I suppose around 11:00 PM. We were entertained by a wonderful display of ceremonial dancing by the side of the river, while candlelit balloons rose up into the evening air. It was modestly spectacular, if I can put those two words together. Mighty nice for an intimate dinner. There were 25 or 30 people invited. The ladies were all wearing black because the mother of the King had recently passed away. There were the usual lavish table decorations and a very lively atmosphere and it was, as the Queen's gatherings generally tended to be, a genuinely enjoyable evening. We got home around 4:00 AM, as I recall. I think that was an unusual gesture on the Queen's part and I appreciated it very much, as did Sacie. So, our experiences overall with the Thai royal family were quite positive. I have a good impression of them and of it as an institution.

Q: The King has certainly played an extremely important role in Thai politics from time to time; as you have just illustrated during this period, he's the one referee who can say "time out."

LAMBERTSON: That's right. He has immense influence, and uses it very carefully. He seems to know when to act and when to husband his influence and over the years he's played his cards very skillfully and to good effect.

Q: We've talked about you as a focal point for U.S. policy to Thailand, bilaterally, multilaterally. Now, let's go back to the embassy and some of, we've talked about who were in some of the positions. I think Matt Daley comes in after Vic as your DCM.

LAMBERTSON: That's right.

Q: How does an ambassador pick a DCM? Or do you get to?

LAMBERTSON: You do up to a point. Vic Tomseth proposed to me when he was leaving that we just let Skip be DCM. I thought, why not? Skip didn't have the rank for it yet, but I thought he was mighty good. I went along with that suggestion and proposed to personnel in the Department, I suppose the DG, that Boyce be elevated. I was told that was absolutely impossible. He was not qualified by rank and moreover it wasn't going to be good for him or the system to leave him in Thailand for that long. That was probably true in retrospect.

Lynn Pascoe was in the pipeline as a possibility. Lynn was in Beijing at the time and was enthusiastic about coming to Bangkok and then something better intervened, I don't recall what it was.

Q: I think he went to AIT.

LAMBERTSON: Did he go to AIT at that point? Yes, distinctly better. I don't recall exactly how Matt Daley came into view as a candidate, but I presume he contacted me. He was a good choice and I'd known him when he was special assistant to Dick Solomon and in other capacities. He did a good job in Thailand. Matt was then poached by Frank Wisner, who desperately wanted him in New Delhi. At that point, Skip Boyce, who in the intervening couple of years had been DCM and Charge in Singapore and was anxious as always to get back to Bangkok, presented himself and was a logical, good choice as my third DCM. Despite that turnover, I really had a good deal of continuity, especially with Skip being there most of the time I was.

Q: How does the personnel system, your staffing, work as ambassador? I mean do you really get involved in that or is that the DCM's duty to pulse the Department and test their recommendations and what not?

LAMBERTSON: It was probably both of our jobs. We didn't have many personnel problems within the State contingent of the embassy during my time in Bangkok. We did have one or two officers who I thought were not up to the job, and in one case frankly should have been removed from the Foreign Service. We had one or two issues like that, but by and large the staffing was good on the State side. There were issues from time to time with other agencies, but there too, by and large I didn't have any big battles to fight, with a couple of exceptions. Do you want me to talk about those exceptions?

Q: Yes, sir.

LAMBERTSON: Both of those happened to involve the military side of the house and that was a big side of the house in Bangkok. I don't know how many of those 600-plus embassy personnel wore uniforms, but quite a few did. We had an organization called Stony Beach which was a DIA operation having to do with POW/MIA accounting run by a colonel. We had another organization called the Joint Task Force-Full Accounting, which provided administrative and logistical backup for field offices in Hanoi, Vientiane and Phnom Penh. Also staffed in Bangkok by a colonel.

The Joint Task Force-Full Accounting was headquartered in Honolulu, within CINCPAC, and was run by a major general at that time. The major general in Honolulu did not like the colonel who ran the Stony Beach operation in Bangkok. He thought that the latter fellow got involved in things he shouldn't have, refused to take direction, and didn't see himself as a member of the Joint Task Force-Full Accounting team - which he in fact was not. In any event the general convinced the admiral, CINCPAC, to remove the colonel. I wanted to keep him; he was a good officer and was doing a good job. But the Admiral was adamant in wanting him out of the country. The upshot of it was that I lost my colonel - who technically worked for me, not for CINCPAC. He had the same relationship to me as the defense attaches did.

I didn't like it at all, but there just wasn't anything I could do about it. It was kind of instructive. It demonstrated a fact of life that probably still holdthat if an area commander gets into a "control contest" with an ambassador involving military personnel, he's probably going to win because he ultimately has more weight, despite the ambassador's status as the president's personal representative in a particular country. I suppose if the Department had entered the fray on my side it might have made a difference, but I don't recall asking for help-it wasn't that kind of issue.

The second problem involved a triumvirate of other colonels. I'm not going to go into detail. But a situation arose that I judged to be harmful to our interests in Thailand, and that in my opinion also represented a challenge to my authority. I fired two of the colonels. It was not easy to do. It effectively ended their careers. It was traumatic for all of us quite frankly.

The incident colored the last few months of my time in Bangkok in a way. Jesse Helms found out about it, naturally, professed outrage in a letter to the Secretary that a mere ambassador could fire two fine military officers in that fashion, and demanded an investigation. To my knowledge the Department never argued the issue with him and I got no discernible support from that quarter. And indeed, as of the time I retired, I was being investigated by the Inspector Generals of both the State Department and DOD. I don't know the outcome of those investigations; I never bothered to try to find out. I think it probably had been a while since an ambassador had done that. But in this case I think it was, on reflection - and I've reflected upon it a good deal - I think it was warranted.

Q: That's hard to top. That's a very unfortunate circumstance to be put in. You have a couple of more things in your notes. General comments, if you wanted to mention them.

LAMBERTSON: I wanted to mention one of the best experiences that I can recall from my ambassadorial yearand one of the earliest. It was a Chiefs of Mission Conference, once again in Honolulu, in December of 1991. The 50th anniversary of Pearl Harbor.

Our COM meeting was held in conjunction with that huge commemoration in which the president and others participated. We were at Pearl Harbor on the morning of December 7, where President Bush gave an excellent speech. There were various other ceremonies during the course of that day, and a reception that evening aboard the USS Missouri. Around midday we retired to Hickam Air Force Base to a conference room for a COM discussion, and we were joined about halfway through it by George Bush. He stayed there for a good long time, I would think an hour at least. We went around the table with people raising issues of concern to them. I was struck by the degree to which the President seemed to be totally at home with the issues, and the setting - the entire context - seemed to be quite familiar to him. He fit in seamlessly, as he should have I guess, as a former Chief of Mission in Beijing and in New York. I was impressed by how quickly he picked up on the issues, how familiar he was with the kinds of things we were talking about. I have thought of that meeting in recent years, and of the contrast between the elder President Bush and his son, and their respective backgrounds and approaches to foreign affairs issues.

Another thing that meant a good deal to me during my time in Bangkok was my association with the aging members of the Free Thai Movement, the people who had been organized in the United States after the Japanese occupied Thailand in 1941, were trained by the OSS and sent back into Thailand to do a little bit of sabotage and a little bit of harassment. They were young college students in the United States at the time of their recruitment and many of them became leaders of Thailand in subsequent years. There was Sitthi, the former Foreign Minister and a good friend, who suggested to me the idea of a dinner for them at the residence. I readily agreed and we had a wonderful time. The guest of honor was former Prime Minister Seni Pramoj, who was the minister in Washington in 1941, and who declined to deliver a declaration of war on the United States as he had been instructed to dinstead working with the OSS to recruit young people to his country's cause. It was a memorable evening, with these very youthful and spirited elderly people enjoying each other's company. It was great to see them, and to reflect upon what they had been and what they had become since. We had a second evening like that with the Free Thai Movement, but by the time of the second, Seni Pramoj had died. I was very glad that we were able to invite him at least once, and we loved it.

We thoroughly enjoyed Bangkok. We enjoyed the visitors that passed through, by and large, although there of course were some we could have done without. But for the most part our visitors were people we liked having around. Sacie was a terrific ambassador's wife. She ran a wonderful household and was extremely hospitable and very good in her own outreach to the American community and in her interaction with the Thai. Very, very good. The residence never looked better than when we were there, thanks to Sacie. She decorated it with our own art, by the way-we didn't draw on the Art in Embassies program. We did a lot of traveling in Thailand, usually in our own vehicle. We almost never took the official car or driver outside Bangkok on our trips, and we had some memorable overnight train and bus journeys as well-modes of transport that were Sacie's idea. She also thought we ought to stay in places recommended by the Lonely Planet guidebooks, so we often found ourselves in Peace Corps-type abodes in our travels. We saw a lot of Thailand that way, despite our inability to speak Thai. We got around somehow, and enjoyed that aspect of Thailand immensely. Sacie did a lot of traveling on her own as well, to some pretty remote parts of the Kingdom.

Speaking of Peace Corps Volunteers, we enjoyed visiting them from time to time, generally in the company of Ginny Kirkwood, our terrific Country Director. We also hosted every new incoming group of volunteers for an evening at the residence, where I swore them in. I'm a fan of the Peace Corps.

Q: The Americans have had a long and intense relationship with the Thai and the ambassador's table depending on the incumbent was one in which you could quite properly kick back and meet your contacts or give them some prestige by securing their invitation to a small intimate ambassador's dinner. Did you do some of that?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, I did. You're quite right. It was probably a fairly high priced ticket in Bangkok in 1991 through '95 and I am sure still is today. You rarely got turned down if you invited somebody to dinner at the residence. We did a lot of that kind of entertaining. Large dinners. Smaller business lunches. Some breakfasts - including once a month for the AmCham board. We used that house very fully during our time there. We also did a huge amount of non-representational entertaining, e.g., with members of the American Embassy staff and community. I'll bet almost everybody at the embassy got to the residence, probably on multiple occasions, during our time there. I have a nice painting upstairs done by the wife of an embassy officer - a quite talented water colorist - of the residence, showing women and children walking in on a Saturday for some kind of event.

Q: How did your representation funds hold out?

LAMBERTSON: We never had a problem. We were undoubtedly out of pocket to some degree because we were honest about not dipping into representation funds for things that were not really representational. But in terms of actual representation money, I don't think we ever were short. I don't think the embassy as a whole was. I don't remember anybody complaining, anyway.

Q: Again, we've gone, always starting in Vietnam, but you've gone to Washington at the highest levels in the bureaus, the deputy assistant secretary and now to your mission. This is going to be your last assignment. Do you see broader American issues that are illustrated in your own career here, things that we're going to have to watch out for as a Foreign Service and as the United States operating in Asia?

LAMBERTSON: There's been such a dramatic change in priorities since 9/11 that I'm not even sure I am capable of answering that question now. I am sure that for every embassy, including the embassy in Bangkok, the war on terror is right up there in first place, as the top priority of almost every part of the mission. In Thailand that would mean further strengthening the security relationship, in its broad sense, and working with the Thai to make sure that they're being as effective as possible in our joint effort. But I have to think eventually we'll get past this terror-dominated era. When we do, we'll find that the priority that was beginning to emerge when I was in Thailand will reassert itself once agaieconomic issues. Traditional security issues of the kind that we used to worry about, wars between states in that part of the world, or externally fueled insurgencies, are unlikely to be as important in the future. I think there is likely to be a stable period ahead in Asia, assuming we can solve, or contain, and move beyond the terrorist problem.

The primacy of economic issues in Bangkok when I was there was to some extent delayed, or obscured, because I still had those other older, traditional things to deal with, like refugees, winding down the Cambodia war, drug problems, a livelier than normal military-to-military relationship, etc. That's why I liked Bangkok. But I think for that embassy in the future, and for all embassies in that part of the world, if you can separate the terrorism issue, or if we can in fact put it behind us someday, economic questions and issues related to trade and investment will be back at the top of their lists of priorities, wouldn't you imagine?

Of course in that part of the world, looming in the background, will be the growing influence of China and the implications of that for the U.S. That will also be on the agenda for Bangkok and our other EAP posts.

Q: I would assume so, too, yes. You had the Vietnamese experience and you were mentioning people along the way who served with you who like yourself did very well in the Foreign Service. Would you say that there's a relationship between those Vietnam years in either maturing those people more quickly or creating a club of people? Or is it serendipitous?

LAMBERTSON: I don't know. There were of course a huge number of people who went through that experience ultimately. When I did it there weren't very many of us, relatively speaking, but by the time the whole thing ended numbers of years later a great many Foreign Service Officers had done their Vietnam time, either voluntarily or involuntarily.

Q: At one time I saw a figure that 10% of the Foreign Service was in Vietnam in the late '60s.

LAMBERTSON: But perhaps serendipity was involved, too. I certainly thought the quality of the FSOs that got together in August of 1964 to go out there in my group was very high. Among their number were a few who did very well indeed. Steve Ledogar was our senior negotiator on various arms negotiations in Geneva when he retired, in I guess the mid-1990s. Frank Wisner, of course, rose to the very top. Desaix Anderson had an excellent career. He should have been an ambassador somewhere, but was Chargï¿½ in Hanoi. Rich Brown was an ambassador in Latin America. I think we were unusually blessed; I'm not going to say unusually talented, although there were some very good people there. But it's true also that being in a place like that can give an impetuous to one's career. I'm sure it did to mine. Had my first post been Medan, rather than Saigon, I would not have become the sort of "known quantity" to people in the East Asia bureau as rapidly. So it was good for me from a career standpoint. I don't know that the same could be said for Wisner or someone like Holbrooke who was kind of a shooting star from the very beginning. But for me, being in Saigon undoubtedly helped me get a jump on the system and I'm sure that was true for others.

Q: It says here all good things must come to an end and so you retire from the Foreign Service. You were showing me earlier a sign here in the house. That sign says, "Home of David F. Lambertson, U.S. Ambassador to Thailand."

LAMBERTSON: That's right. An official green highway sign. It stood on the outskirts of Fairview. There was one on the east side and one on the west side. Several years after I'd come home, the city fathers figured they ought to take them down since they were no longer strictly true. My mother was chagrined when that happened, but she made sure that she got both of them. I have one in here and the other one out in the garage.

Q: Well, that goes back to where we started. If all Foreign Service Officers are sons and daughters of the East Coast elite, I think you're extremely out of place, sir.

LAMBERTSON: Yes.

Q: What do you do in retirement?

LAMBERTSON: I came back to the University of Kansas, where I have done some outreach work and some teaching. I've particularly enjoyed teaching in the honors program. I've done that intermittently since I've been back. I also had a nice stint in California, teaching for a semester at Claremont McKenna College near LA, under the auspices of the Freeman Foundation. That was the fall semester of 2002.

Q: But you are also involved in the KEDO organization. How did that arise?

LAMBERTSON: I've been traveling to Korea, North Korea, two or three times a year for KEDO, the Korean Energy Development Organization. KEDO is an outgrowth of the 1994 Agreed Framework between North Korea and the United States. When that agreement was reached in 1994, I didn't think much of it. It seemed like we were simply bribing the North Koreans to stop doing what they shouldn't be doing anyway. Over the years I've taken a somewhat kindlier view of it. Incidentally when I was still in Bangkok, Tom Hubbard, who did a lot of the negotiating of the Agreed Framework, called and asked me if I would like to be the head of KEDO. I said I really didn't think I wanted to live in Washington or New York.

In any event, my Saigon roommate, Spence Richardson, at some point began working for KEDO as the on-site American representative in Kumho, a place on the east coast of North Korea where a couple of large nuclear power plants have been under construction by KEDO. They needed another person to do that, and it sounded kind of interesting to me, so I did it for the first time not quite four years ago and I've been doing it off and on since then.

Q: Four years ago, the year 2000?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, I was in North Korea while the Florida vote count controversy was going on. I wasn't sure which place was more bizarre.

Q: How much time do you devote to that?

LAMBERTSON: On average over these last three to four years, two or three times a year for five or six weeks at a time, or occasionally longer. I've spent well over a year of my life now in North Korea.

Q: What exactly are your duties out there?

LAMBERTSON: Being the American representative in Kumho reminds me a little bit of being in a very remote and very quiet constituent post. My colleagues in the office are four South Koreans, representing the Foreign Ministry and other agencies, and one Japanese Gaimusho man. Always one American. The official languages of KEDO are Korean and English. The North Koreans think it important that an American always be there. We meet periodically with our North Korean counterparts if some operational problem arises. I have occasionally traveled to Pyongyang or places in the vicinity of Pyongyang to participate in meetings between delegations from New York, Tokyo and Seoul and the North Korean side. I take a lot of books to read when I go to North Korea. Kumho is a good place to read and write, and engage in athletic activity and that sort of thing. A quiet life, but I find it interesting to live in a "denied" area, and to be the only westerner.

Q: So, it's over-seeing the construction of the nuclear substitute facilities?

LAMBERTSON: That's right. LWR power plants.

Q: That construction is actually South Korean, isn't it?

LAMBERTSON: The project is funded 80% by the South Korean government and 20% by Japan, roughly. The United States has virtually no financial stake in the construction of these nuclear power plants. Our commitment was to provide heavy fuel oil until the first of the nuclear reactors came on line. The whole agreement is in limbo right now because in 2002 we discovered and confronted the North Koreans with evidence that they had been cheating on the Agreed Framework for several years by secretly developing a highly enriched uranium program, which is another way to make a bomb. The Agreed Framework froze their plutonium production program. Since then we've cut off the heavy fuel oil and as of nine months ago the entire project was suspended, so there is no construction going on right now. There won't be unless and until a new comprehensive agreement is reached with the North Koreans in these Beijing talks and there's not much prospect of that happening between now and November 2nd. The Agreed Framework is hanging by a thread, as is this particular project, so every time I go out there I assume it's probably going to be my last trip. It's not a long term career, but it's been interesting.

Q: And you get to go around the country. How does one get from, what did you say, the East Coast to Pyongyang?

LAMBERTSON: I've traveled by bus south to Hamhung and then flown by AN-24 to Pyongyang. I've gone by MI-8 helicopter direct from Kumho to Pyongyang, and several times I've gone by road via Wonsan, which I find fascinating.

Q: You were saying it's a good place to get some athletic exercise. I understand actually that's something that you're good at since you ran the Hanoi marathon?

LAMBERTSON: Thank you for asking. I had a brief marathon career. I began to run half-marathons when I was in Thailand. Tex Lierly of the DEA and a group of embassy people were members of a running club in Thailand. They participated in monthly races in some wonderful places all over Thailand, and I joined them - it was great fun to do that. Then Tex said we ought to try the Hanoi marathon in January of 1995, so I agreed and we practiced even more - early morning long distance runs - and I ran the Hanoi marathon in January of that year. Did it in a good time - three hours 25 minutes - good enough to qualify for Boston the next year. I was interviewed at the finish line in Hanoi by a couple of correspondents from the AP who were interested in the fact that an American ambassador was in Hanoi running in a marathon when we didn't have diplomatic relations. Was this a signal of something to come? I assured them that no political signal was intended; I was just there to run a marathon. It was a nice little interview and it was published along with my very good time in lots of sports pages around the United States, including the Washington Post and New York Times. That was very satisfying to a life-long sports fan and perpetual aspiring athlete.

Q: A sports aficionado. You were saying now you've run the Boston marathon.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, I've done that five times. My last one was 2000. I don't think I'll be running it again.

Let me say, by way of winding this up, that for me the Foreign Service was a good fit. I can't think of another way I'd have preferred to spend my working life. Seeing that advertisement for the Foreign Service exam on my college bulletin board in 1961 was a lucky thing. I have told the occasional audience, or individuals considering the Foreign Service, that for me the advantages were threefold: the ability to live and work in interesting places while representing the United States, the opportunity to work with very talented colleagues, and the chance, occasionally at least, to participate in significant eventrather than merely be a witness or recorder of them, as journalists or academics might be. That last is the most important. The Department can be frustrating and infuriating sometimes, especially in its management of people. But all in all, I had a good run and I am grateful.

Q: Would you like to give a 25-word description of this beautiful farm that you have here in Kansas? This is amazing. It's been wonderful. I thank you for the opportunity. You've got 80 acres?

LAMBERTSON: Thank you. Yes, Sacie and I bought this place in 1996 and first built a small cabin on it where we lived for three years while we were building this house. We did a lot of the work ourselves. Sacie is a good worker and also a good general contractor. This whole thing has been her project. The design is fundamentally her design. The construction is quite innovative, and the house is extremely energy efficient. It also proved to be highly labor intensive to build and probably cost us more than we had budgeted for, but we have a very handsome home.

End of interview